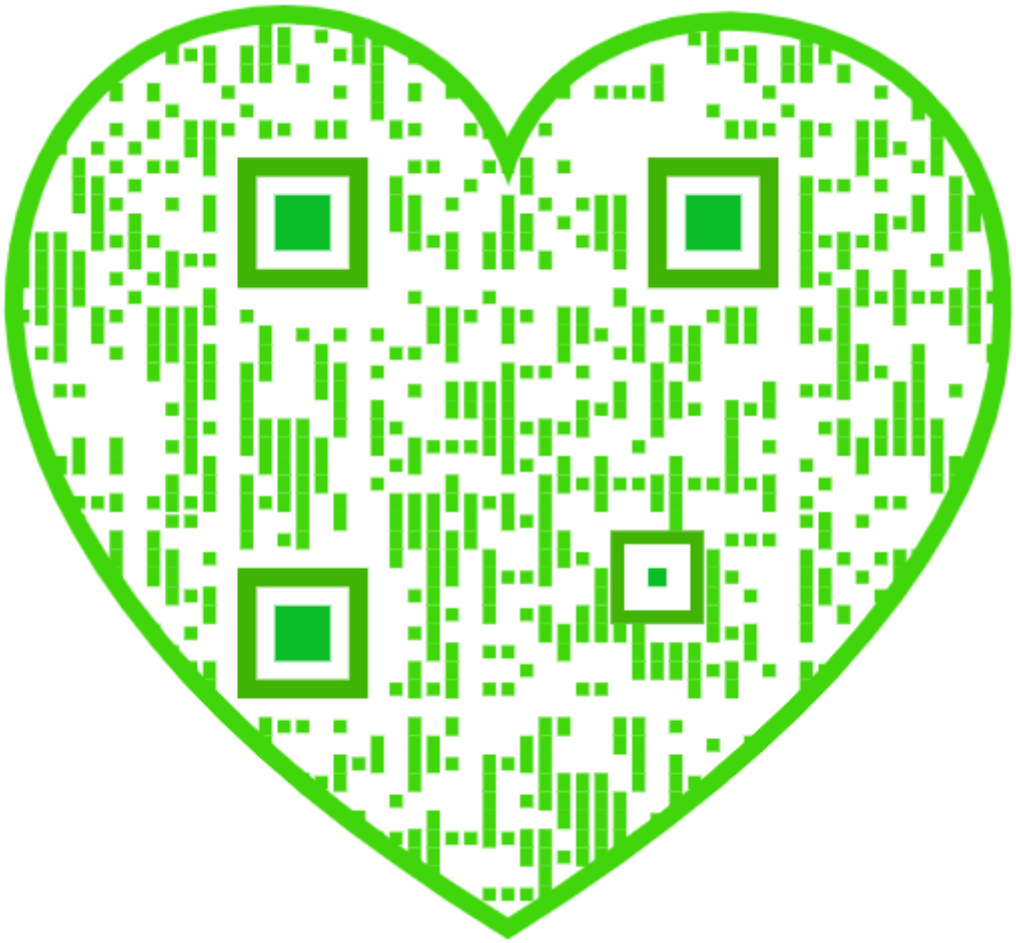

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MY SPECULATION IN CHINA WARE. (8)

CONFESSIONS

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OF

A HOUSEKEEPER.

BY MRS. JOHN SMITH.

PHILADELPHIA:
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ILLUSTRATIONS.

PAGE

My Speculation in China Ware 8

Showing why the Dinner was Late 20

Cheap Furniture 38

A convenient Distance from the City 55

A plain Family Dinner 68

Not at Home 85

Rather Slippery 99

Sausages for Tea 111

"I wonder who it is from. Mrs. Smith gets a great many Letters" 122

Broiling a Lobster 146

"If any thing is sent Home, lay it carefully on my Bed" 163

Moths in my Auction Sofa 178

ILLUSTRATIONS.

CONTENTS.

	PAGE
CHAPTER I.	
My Speculation in China Ware	9
CHAPTER II.	
Something about Cooks	21
CHAPTER III.	
Light on the Subject	29
CHAPTER IV.	
Cheap Furniture	37
CHAPTER V.	
Is it Economy?	45
CHAPTER VI.	
Living at a convenient Distance	54
CHAPTER VII.	
The picked-up Dinner	69
CHAPTER VIII.	
Who is Kriss Kringle?	77
CHAPTER IX.	
Not at Home	84
CHAPTER X.	
Shirt Buttons	92
CHAPTER XI.	
Pavement Washing in Winter	98

PAGE

CHAPTER XII.

Regard for the Poor 105

CHAPTER XIII.

Something more about Cooks 110

CHAPTER XIV.

Not a Rag on their Backs 116

CHAPTER XV.

Curiosity 123

CHAPTER XVI.

House-cleaning 129

CHAPTER XVII.

Broiling a Lobster 147

CHAPTER XVIII.

The Strawberry-woman 150

CHAPTER XIX.

Lots of Things 162

CHAPTER XX.

A Cure for Low Spirits 170

CHAPTER XXI.

A Bargain 179

CHAPTER XXII.

A peevish Day and its Consequences 187

CHAPTER XXIII.

Words 197

CHAPTER XXIV.

May be so 203

CHAPTER XXV.

"The poor Child died" 209

CONFESSIONS OF A HOUSEKEEPER.

CHAPTER I.

MY SPECULATION IN CHINA WARE.

This happened a very few years after my marriage, and is one of those feeling incidents in life that we never forget. My husband's income was moderate, and we found it necessary to deny ourselves many little articles of ornament and luxury, to the end that there might be no serious abatement in the comforts of life. In furnishing our house, we had been obliged to content ourselves mainly with things useful. Our parlor could boast of nine cane-seat chairs; one high-backed cane-seat rocking chair; a pair of card tables; a pair of ottomans, the covers for which I had worked in worsted; and a few illustrated books upon the card tables. There were no pictures on the walls, nor ornaments on the mantle pieces.

For a time after my marriage with Mr. Smith, I did not think much about the plainness of our style of living; but after a while, contrasts between my own parlors and those of one or two friends, would take place in my mind; and I

often found myself wishing that we could afford a set of candelabras, a pair of china vases, or some choice pieces of Bohemian glass. In fact, I set my heart on something of the kind, though I concealed the weakness from my husband.

Time stole on, and one increase after another to our family, kept up the necessity for careful expenditure, and at no time was there money enough in the purse to justify any outlay beyond what the wants of the household required. So my mantel pieces remained bare as at first, notwithstanding the desire for something to put on them still remained active.

One afternoon, as I sat at work renovating an old garment, with the hope of making it look almost "as good as new," my cook entered and said—

"There's a man down stairs, Mrs. Smith, with a basket full of the most beautiful glass dishes and china ornaments that you ever did see; and he says that he will sell them for old clothes."

"For old clothes?" I responded, but half comprehending what the girl meant.

"Yes ma'am. If you have got an old coat, or a pair of pantaloons that aint good for nothing, he will buy them, and pay you in glass or china."

I paused for a moment to think, and then said—

"Tell him to come up into the dining room, Mary."

The girl went down stairs, and soon came back in company with a dull looking old man, who carried on his arm a large basket, in which were

temptingly displayed rich china vases, motto and presentation cups and saucers, glass dishes, and sundry other articles of a like character.

"Any old coats, pantaloons or vests?" said the man, as he placed, carefully, his basket on the floor. "Don't want any money. See here! Beautiful!"

And as he spoke, he took up a pair of vases and held them before my eyes. They were just the thing for my mantle pieces, and I covetted them on the instant.

"What's the price?" I enquired.

"Got an old coat?" was my only answer. "Don't want money."

My husband was the possessor of a coat that had seen pretty good service, and which he had not worn for some time. In fact, it had been voted superannuated, and consigned to a dark corner of the clothes-press. The thought of this garment came very naturally into my mind, and with the thought a pleasant exhilaration of feeling, for I already saw the vases on my mantles.

"Any old clothes?" repeated the vender of china ware.

Without a word I left the dining room, and hurried up to where our large clothes-press stood, in the passage above. From this I soon abstracted the coat, and then descended with quick steps.

The dull face of the old man brightened, the moment his eyes fell upon the garment. He seized it with a nervous movement, and seemed to take in its condition at a single glance. Ap-

parently, the examination was not very satisfactory, for he let the coat fall, in a careless manner, across a chair, giving his shoulders a shrug, while a slight expression of contempt flitted over his countenance.

"Not much good!" fell from his lips after a pause.

By this time I had turned to his basket, and was examining, more carefully, its contents. Most prominent stood the china vases, upon which my heart was already set; and instinctively I took them in my hands.

"What will you give for the coat?" said I.

The old man gave his head a significant shake, as he replied—

"No very good."

"It's worth something," I returned. "Many a poor person would be glad to buy it for a small sum of money. It's only a little defaced. I'm sure its richly worth four or five dollars."

"Pho! Pho! Five dollar! Pho!" The old man seemed angry at my most unreasonable assumption.

"Well, well," said I, beginning to feel a little impatient, "just tell me what you will give for it."

"What you want?" he enquired, his manner visibly changing.

"I want these vases, at any rate," I answered, holding up the articles I had mentioned.

"Worth four, five dollar!" ejaculated the dealer, in well feigned surprise.

I shook my head. He shrugged his shoulders,

and commenced searching his basket, from which, after a while, he took a china cup and saucer, on which I read, in gilt letters, "For my Husband."

"Give you this," said he.

It was now my time to show surprise; I answered—

"Indeed you won't, then. But I'll tell you what I will do; I'll let you have the coat for the vases and this cup and saucer."

To this proposition the man gave an instant and decided negative, and seemed half offended by my offer. He threw the coat, which was in his hands again, upon a chair, and stooping down took his basket on his arm. I was deceived by his manner, and began to think that I had proposed rather a hard bargain; so I said—

"You can have the coat for the vases, if you care to make the exchange; if not, why no harm is done."

For the space of nearly half a minute, the old man stood in apparent irresolution, then he replied, as he set down his basket and took out the pair of vases—

"I don't care; you shall have them."

I took the vases and he took the coat. A moment or two more, and I heard the street door close behind the dealer in china ware, with a very decided jar.

"Ain't they beautiful, aunty?" said I to my old aunt Rachel, who had been a silent witness of the scene I have just described; and I held the pair of vases before her eyes.

"Why yes, they are rather pretty, Jane," replied aunt Rachel, a little coldly, as I thought.

"Rather pretty! They are beautiful," said I warmly. "See there!" And I placed them on the dining room mantle. "How much they will improve our parlors."

"Not half so much as that old coat you as good as gave away would have improved the feelings as well as the looks of poor Mr. Bryan, who lives across the street," was the unexpected and rebuking answer of aunt Rachel.

The words smote on my feelings. Mr. Bryan was a poor, but honest and industrious young man, upon whose daily labor a wife and five children were dependent. He went meanly clad, because he could not earn enough, in addition to what his family required, to buy comfortable clothing for himself. I saw, in an instant, what the true disposition of the coat should have been. The china vases would a little improve the appearance of my parlors; but how many pleasant feelings and hours and days of comfort, would the old coat have given to Mr. Bryan. I said no more. Aunt Rachel went on with her knitting, and I took the vases down into the parlors and placed them on the mantles—one in each room. But they looked small, and seemed quite solitary. So I put one on each end of a single mantle. This did better; still, I was disappointed in the appearance they made, and a good deal displeased with myself. I felt that I had made a bad bargain—that is, one from which I should obtain no real pleasure.

For a while I sat opposite the mantle-piece,

looking at the vases—but, not admiringly; then I left the parlor, and went about my household duties, but, with a pressure on my feelings. I was far, very far from being satisfied with myself.

About an hour afterwards my husband came home. I did not take him into the parlor to show him my little purchase, for, I had no heart to do so. As we sat at the tea table, he said, addressing me—

"You know that old coat of mine that is up in the clothes-press?"

I nodded my head in assent, but did not venture to speak.

"I've been thinking to-day," added my husband, "that it would be just the thing for Mr. Bryan, who lives opposite. I'ts rather too much worn for me, but will look quite decent on him, compared with the clothes he now wears. Don't you think it is a good thought? We will, of course, make him a present of the garment."

My eyes drooped to the table, and I felt the blood crimsoning my face. For a moment or two I remained silent, and then answered—

"I'm sorry you didn't think of this before; but it's too late now."

"Too late! Why?" enquired my husband.

"I sold the coat this afternoon," was my reply.

"Sold it!"

"Yes. A man came along with some handsome china ornaments, and I sold the coat for a pair of vases to set on our mantle-pieces."

There was an instant change in my husband's face. He disapproved of what I had done; and,

though he uttered no condemning words, his countenance gave too clear an index to his feelings.

"The coat would have done poor Mr. Byran a great deal more good than the vases will ever do Jane," spoke up aunt Rachel, with less regard for my feelings than was manifested by my husband. "I don't think," she continued, "that any body ought to sell old clothes for either money or nicknackeries to put on the mantlepieces. Let them be given to the poor, and they'll do some good. There isn't a housekeeper in moderate circumstances that couldn't almost clothe some poor family, by giving away the cast off garments that every year accumulate on her hands."

How sharply did I feel the rebuking spirit in these words of aunt Rachel.

"What's done can't be helped now," said my husband kindly, interrupting, as he spoke, some further remarks that aunt Rachel evidently intended to make. "We must do better next time."

"I must do better," was my quick remark, made in penitent tones. "I was very thoughtless."

To relieve my mind, my husband changed the subject of conversation; but, nothing could relieve the pressure upon my feelings, caused by a too acute consciousness of having done what in the eyes of my husband, looked like a want of true humanity. I could not bear that he should think me void of sympathy for others.

The day following was Sunday. Church time came, and Mr. Smith went to the clothes press

for his best coat, which had been worn only for a few months.

"Jane!" he called to me suddenly, in a voice that made me start. "Jane! Where is my best coat?"

"In the clothes press," I replied, coming out from our chamber into the passage, as I spoke.

"No; it's not here," was his reply. "And, I shouldn't wonder if you had sold my good coat for those china vases."

"No such thing!" I quickly answered, though my heart gave a great bound at his words; and then sunk in my bosom with a low tremor of alarm.

"Here's my old coat," said Mr. Smith, holding up that defaced garment—"Where is the new one?"

"The old clothes man has it, as sure as I live!" burst from my lips.

"Well, that is a nice piece of work, I must confess!"

This was all my husband said; but it was enough to smite me almost to the floor. Covering my face with my hands, I dropped into a chair, and sat and sobbed for a while bitterly.

"It can't be helped now, Jane," said Mr. Smith, at length, in a soothing voice. "The coat is gone, and there is no help for it. You will know better next time."

That was all he said to me then, and I was grateful for his kind consideration. He saw that I was punished quite severely enough, and did not add to my pain by rebuke or complaint.

An attempt was made during the week to re-

cover the coat, valued at some twenty dollars; but the china ornament-man was not to be found —he had made too good a bargain to run the risk of having it broken.

About an hour after the discovery of the loss of my husband's coat, I went quietly down into the parlor, and taking from the mantle-piece the china vases, worth, probably, a dollar for the pair, concealed them under my apron, lest any one should see what I had; and, returning up stairs, hid them away in a dark closet, where they have ever since remained.

The reader may be sure that I never forgot this, my first and last speculation in china ware.

SHOWING WHY THE DINNER WAS LATE. (20)

CHAPTER II.

SOMETHING ABOUT COOKS.

WAS there ever a good cook who hadn't some prominent fault that completely overshadowed her professional good qualities? If my experience is to answer the question, the reply will be —*no*.

I had been married several years before I was fortunate enough to obtain a cook that could be trusted to boil a potato, or broil a steak. I felt as if completely made up when Margaret served her first dinner. The roast was just right, and all the vegetables were cooked and flavored as well as if I had done it myself—in fact, a little better. My husband eat with a relish not often exhibited, and praised almost every thing on the table.

For a week, one good meal followed another in daily succession. We had hot cakes, light and fine-flavored, every morning for breakfast, with coffee not to be beaten—and chops or steaks steaming from the gridiron, that would have gladdened the heart of an epicure. Dinner was served, during the time, with a punctuality that was rarely a minute at fault, while every article of food brought upon the table, fairly tempted the appetite. Light rolls, rice cakes, or "Sally Luns," made without suggestion on my part,

usually met us at tea time. In fact, the very delight of Margaret's life appeared to be in cooking. She was born for a cook.

Moreover, strange to say, Margaret was good-tempered, a most remarkable thing in a good cook; and more remarkable still, was tidy in her person, and cleanly in her work.

"She is a treasure," said I to my husband, one day, as we passed from the dining-room, after having partaken of one of her excellent dinners.

"She's too good," replied Mr. Smith—"too good to last. There must be some bad fault about her—good cooks always have bad faults—and I am looking for its appearance every day."

"Don't talk so, Mr. Smith. There is no reason in the world why a good cook should not be as faultless as any one else."

Even while I said this, certain misgivings intruded themselves. My husband went to his store soon after.

About three o'clock Margaret presented herself, all dressed to go out, and said that she was going to see her sister, but would be back in time to get tea.

She came back, as she promised, but, alas for my good cook! The fault appeared. She was so much intoxicated that, in attempting to lift the kettle from the fire, she let it fall, and came near scalding herself dreadfully. Oh, dear! I shall never forget the sad disappointment of that hour. How the pleasant images of good dinners and comfortable breakfasts and suppers faded

from my vision. The old trouble was to come back again, for the faultless cook had manifested a fault that vitiated, for us, all her good qualities.

On the next day, I told Margaret that we must part; but she begged so hard to be kept in her place, and promised good behaviour in future so earnestly, that I was prevailed on to try her again. It was of no use, however—in less than a week she was drunk again, and I had to let her go.

After that, for some months, we had burnt steaks, waxy potatoes, and dried roast beef to our hearts' content; while such luxuries as muffins, hot cakes, and the like were not to be seen on our uninviting table.

My next good cook had such a violent temper, that I was actually afraid to show my face in the kitchen. I bore with her until patience was no longer a virtue, and then she went.

Biddy, who took charge of my "kitchen cabinet," a year or so afterwards, proved herself a culinary artist of no ordinary merit. But, alas! Biddy "kept a room;" and so many strange disappearances of bars of soap, bowls of sugar, prints of butter, etc., took place, that I was forced to the unwilling conclusion that her room was simply a store room for the surplussage of mine. Some pretty strong evidence on this point coming to my mind, I dismissed Biddy, who was particularly forward in declaring her honesty, although I had never accused her of being wanting in that inestimable virtue.

Some of my experiences in cooks have been

amusing enough. Or, I should rather say, are amusing enough to *think* about: they were rather annoying at the time of their occurrence. One of these experiences I will relate. I had obtained a "treasure" in a new cook, who was not only good tempered and cleanly, but understood her business reasonably well. Kitty was a little different from former incumbents of her office in this, that she took an interest in reading, and generally dipped into the morning paper before it found its way up stairs. To this, of course, I had no objection, but was rather pleased to see it. Time, however, which proves all things, showed my cook to be rather too literary in her inclinations. I often found her reading, when it was but reasonable for me to expect that she would be working; and overdone or burnt dishes occasionally marked the degree in which her mind was absorbed in her literary pleasures, which I discovered in time, were not of the highest order—such books as the "Mysteries of Paris" furnishing the aliment that fed her imagination.

"Jane," said my husband to me one morning, as he was about leaving the house, "I believe I must invite my old friend Green to dine with me to-day. He will leave the city to-morrow, and I may not have the pleasure of a social hour with him again for years. Besides, I want to introduce him to you. We were intimate as young men, and much attached to each other. I would like you to know him."

"Invite him, by all means," was my reply.

"I will send home a turkey from market,"

said Mr. Smith, as he stood holding on to the open door. "Tell Kitty to cook it just right. Mrs. Green, I am told, is a first-rate housekeeper, and I feel like showing you off to the best advantage."

"Don't look for too much," I replied, smiling, "lest you be disappointed."

Mr. Smith went away, and I walked back to the kitchen door to say a word to Kitty. As I looked in, the sound of my feet on the floor caused her to start. She was standing near a window, and at my appearance she hurriedly concealed something under her apron.

"Kitty," said I, "we are to have company to dine with us to-day. Mr. Smith will send home a turkey, which you must dress and cook in the best manner. I will be down during the morning to make some lemon puddings. Be sure to have a good fire in the range, and see that all the drafts are clear."

Kitty promised that every thing should be right, and I went up stairs. In due time the marketing came home. About eleven o'clock I repaired to the kitchen, and, much to my surprise, found all in disorder.

"What in the world have you been doing all the morning?" said I, feeling a little fretted.

Kitty excused herself good naturedly, and commenced bustling about to put things to rights, while I got flour and other articles necessary for my purpose, and went to work at my lemon puddings, which were, in due time, ready for the oven. Giving all necessary directions as to their baking, and charging Kitty to be sure to have

every thing on the table precisely at our usual hour for dining, I went up into the nursery to look after the children, and to see about other matters requiring my attention.

Time passed on until, to my surprise, I heard the clock strike one. I had yet to dress for dinner.

"I wonder how Kitty is coming on?" said I to myself. "I hope she will not let the puddings get all dried up."

But, I felt too much in a hurry to go down and satisfy myself as to the state of affairs in the kitchen; and took it for granted that all was right.

A little while afterwards, I perceived an odor as of something burning.

"What is that?" came instinctively from my lips. "If Kitty has let the puddings burn!"

Quick as thought I turned from my room, and went gliding down stairs. As I neared the kitchen, the smell of burned flour, or pastry, grew stronger. All was silent below; and I approached in silence. On entering Kitty's domain, I perceived that lady seated in front of the range, with a brown covered pamphlet novel held close to her face, in the pages of which she was completely lost. I never saw any one more entirely absorbed in a book. No sign of dinner was any where to be seen. Upon the range was a kettle of water boiling over into the fire, and from one of the ovens poured forth a dark smoke, that told too plainly the ruin of my lemon puddings. And, to cap all, the turkey, yet guiltless of fire or dripping pan, was upon the floor, in possession

of a strange cat, which had come in through the open window. Bending over the still entranced cook, I read the title of her book. It was "THE WANDERING JEW."

"Kitty!" I don't much wonder, now, at the start she gave, for I presume there was not the zephyr's softness in my voice.

"Oh, ma'am!" She caught her breath as her eyes rested upon the cat and the turkey. "Indeed, ma'am!" And then she made a spring towards puss, who, nimbly eluding her, passed out by the way through which she had come in.

By this time I had jerked open the oven door, when there came rushing out a cloud of smoke, which instantly filled the room. My puddings were burned to a crisp!

As for the turkey, the cat had eaten off one side of the breast, and it was no longer fit for the table.

"Well! this is fine work!" said I, in an angry, yet despairing voice. "Fine work, upon my word!"

"Oh, ma'am!" Kitty interrupted me by saying, "I'll run right off and buy another turkey, and have it cooked in time. Indeed I will, ma'am! And I'll pay for it. It's all my fault! oh dear! dear me! Now don't be angry, Mrs. Smith! I'll have dinner all ready in time, and no one will be any the wiser for this."

"In time!" and I raised my finger towards the kitchen clock, the hands of which marked the period of half past one. Two o'clock was our regular dinner hour.

"Mercy!" ejaculated the frightened cook, as

she sank back upon a chair; "I thought it was only a little past eleven. I am sure it was only eleven when I sat down just to read a page or two while the puddings were in the oven!"

The truth was, the "Wandering Jew," in the most exciting portion of which she happened to be, proved too much for her imagination. Her mind had taken no note of time, and two hours passed with the rapidity of a few minutes.

"I don't exactly comprehend this," said my husband, as he sat down with his old friend, to dine off of broiled steak and potatoes, at half-past two o'clock.

"It's all the fault of the 'Wandering Jew!'" I replied, making an effort to drive away, with a smile, the red signs of mortification that were in my face.

"The Wandering Jew!" returned my husband, looking mystified.

"Yes, the fault lies with that imaginary personage," said I, "strange as it may seem." And then I related the mishaps of the morning. For desert, we had some preserved fruit and cream, and a hearty laugh over the burnt puddings and disfigured turkey.

Poor Kitty couldn't survive the mortification. She never smiled again in my house; and, at the close of the week, removed to another home.

CHAPTER III.

LIGHT ON THE SUBJECT.

"THE oil's out, mum," said Hannah, the domestic who succeeded Kitty, pushing her head into the room where I sat sewing.

"It can't be," I replied.

"Indade, mum, and it is. There isn't the full of a lamp left," was the positive answer.

"Then, what have you done with it?" said I, in a firm voice. "It isn't four days since a gallon was sent home from the store."

"Four days! It's more nor a week, mum!"

"Don't tell me that, Hannah," I replied, firmly; "for I know better. I was out on last Monday, and told Brown to send us home a gallon."

"Sure, and it's burned, mum, thin! What else could go with it?"

"It never was burned in our lamps," said I, in answer to this. "You've either wasted it, or given it away."

At this Hannah, as in honor bound, became highly indignant, and indulged in certain impertinences which I did not feel inclined to notice.

But, as the oil was all gone, and no mistake; and, as the prospect of sitting in darkness was not, by any means, an agreeable one—the only remedy was to order another gallon.

Something was wrong; that was clear. The oil had never been burned.

That evening, myself and husband talked over the matter, and both of us came to the conclusion, that it would never do. The evil must be remedied. A gallon of oil must not again disappear in four days.

"Why,' said my husband, "it ought to last us at least a week and a half."

"Not quite so long," I replied. "We burn a gallon a week."

"Not fairly, I'm inclined to think. But four days is out of all conscience."

I readily assented to this, adding some trite remark about the unconscionable wastefulness of domestics.

On the next morning, as my husband arose from bed, he shivered in the chilly air, saying, as he did so:

"That girl's let the fire go out again in the heater! Isn't it too bad? This thing happens now every little while. I'm sure I've said enough to her about it. There's nothing wanted but a little attention."

"It is too bad, indeed," I added.

"There's that fishy smell again!" exclaimed Mr. Smith. "What can it be?"

"Fishy smell! So there is."

"Did you get any mackerel from the store yesterday?"

"None."

"Perhaps Hannah ordered some?"

"No. I had a ham sent home, and told her to have a slice of that broiled for breakfast."

"I don't know what to make of it. Every now and then that same smell comes up through the register—particularly in the morning. I'll bet a sixpence there's some old fish tub in the cellar of which she's made kindling."

"That may be it," said I.

And, for want of a better reason, we agreed, for the time being, upon that hypothesis.

At the end of another four days, word came up that our best sperm oil, for which we paid a dollar and forty cents a gallon, was out again.

"Impossible!" I ejaculated.

"But it is mum," said Hannah. "There's not a scrimption left—not so much as the full of a thimble."

"You must be mistaken. A gallon of oil has never been burned in this house in four days."

"We burned the other gallon in four days," said Hannah, with provoking coolness. "The evenings are very long, and we have a great many lights. There's the parlor light, and the passage light, and the—"

"It's no use for you to talk, Hannah," I replied, interrupting her. "No use in the world. A gallon of oil in four days has never gone by fair means in this house. So don't try to make me believe it—for I won't. I m too old a housekeeper for that."

Finding that I was not to be convinced, Hannah became angry, and said something about her not being a "thafe." I was unmoved by this, however; and told her, with as much sternness of manner as I could assume, that I should

hold her responsible for any future waste of the article; and that if she did not feel inclined to remain on such terms, she had better go.

"Dade, thin, and I'll go to onst," was the girl's spirited answer.

"Very well, Hannah. You are your own mistress in this respect," said I, coolly. "I'm not in the least troubled about filling your place; nor fearful of getting one who will waste a gallon of oil in four days."

Hannah retired from my presence in high indignation, and I fully expected that she would desert my house forthwith. But, no; unlike some others of her class, she knew when she had a good place, and had sense enough to keep it as long as she could stay.

In due time she cooled off, and I heard no more about her getting another place.

"There's that fishy smell again!" exclaimed my husband, as he arose up in bed one morning, a day or two afterwards, and snuffed the air. "And, as I live, the fire in the heater is all out again! I'll have some light on this subject, see if I don't.

And he sprung upon the floor, at the same time hurriedly putting on his dressing gown and a pair of slippers.

"Where are you going?" said I, seeing him moving towards the door.

"To find out where this fishy smell comes from," he replied, disappearing as he spoke.

In about five minutes, Mr. Smith returned.

"Well, if that don't beat all!" he exclaimed, as he re-entered the chamber.

"What?" I very naturally enquired.

"I've found out all about that fishy smell," said he.

"What about it? Where does it come from?"

"You wouldn't guess in a month of Sundays! Well, this is a great world! Live and learn!"

"Explain yourself, Mr. Smith. I'm all impatience."

"I will; and in a few words. The fire was out in the heater."

"Yes."

"And I very naturally took my way down to where I expected to find our lady at work in the re-kindling process."

"Well?"

"Sure enough, there she was, kindling the fire with a vengeance."

"With what?" I asked. "With a vengeance?"

"Yes, with a vengeance to my pocket. She had the oil can in her hands, and was pouring its contents freely into the furnace, in order to quicken combustion. I now understand all about this fishy smell."

"And I all about the remarkable disappearance of a gallon of oil in four days. Kindling the fire with dollar and forty cent oil!"

"Even so!"

"What did you say to her, Mr. Smith?"

"Nothing. But I rather think she'll not want me to look at her again, the huzzy!"

"Kindling fire with my best sperm oil! Well, I can't get over that!"

Something in this wise I continued to ejacu-

late, now and then, until my astonishment fairly wore itself out.

I didn't consider it worth while to say any thing to Hannah when I went down stairs, thinking it best to let the look my husband spoke of, do its work. By the way, I don't much wonder that she was frightened at his look—for he can —But I forgot—I am speaking of my husband, and he might happen to read this.

Of course, Hannah's days in my house were numbered. No faith was to be placed in a creature who could so shamefully destroy a useful article placed in her hands. If she would burn up the oil, it was but fair to infer that she would as remorselessly make way with other things. So I parted with her. She begged me to let her stay, and made all sorts of promises. But I was immovable.

Whether I bettered myself in the change, is somewhat doubtful.

CHAPTER IV.

CHEAP FURNITURE.

One of the cardinal virtues, at least for housekeepers who are not overburdened in the matter of income, is economy. In the early part of our married life, Mr. Smith and myself were forced to the practice of this virtue, or incur debt, of which both of us had a natural horror. For a few years we lived in the plain style with which we had begun the world. But, when our circumstances improved, we very naturally desired to improve the appearance of things in our household. Our cane seat chairs and ingrain carpet looked less and less attractive every day. And, when we went out to spend an evening, socially, with our friends, the contrast between home and abroad was strikingly apparent to our minds.

"I think," said Mr. Smith to me, one day, "that it is time we re-furnished our parlors."

"If you can afford the outlay," I remarked.

"It won't cost a great deal," he returned.

"Not over three hundred dollars," said I.

Mr. Smith shook his head as he answered:

"Half that sum ought to be sufficient. What will we want?"

"A dozen mahogany chairs to begin with," I replied. "There will be sixty dollars."

"You don't expect to pay five dollars a-piece for chairs?" said my husband, in a tone of surprise.

"I don't think you can get good ones for less."

"Indeed we can. I was looking at a very handsome set yesterday; aud the man only asked four dollars for them. I don't in the least doubt that I could get them for three and a half."

"And a dear bargain you would make of that, I do not in the least doubt. It is poor economy, Mr. Smith, to buy cheap furniture. It costs a great deal more in the end, than good furniture, and never gives you any satisfaction."

"But these were good chairs, Jane. As good as I would wish to look at. The man said they were from one of the best shops in the city, and of superior workmanship and finish."

As I make it a point never to prolong an argument with my husband, when I see his mind bent in one direction, I did not urge my view of the case any farther. It was settled, however, that we could afford to re-furnish our parlors in a better style, and that in the course of the coming week, we should go out together and select a Brussels carpet, a sofa, a dozen mahogany chairs, a centre table, &c.

As I had foreseen from the beginning, my husband's ideas of economy were destined to mar everything. At one of the cabinet ware-rooms was a very neat, well-made set of chairs, for which five dollars and a half were asked, but which the dealer, seeing that he was beyond our mark, offered for five dollars. They were cheap at that price. But Mr. Smith could not see

that they were a whit better than the set of chairs just mentioned as offered for four dollars; and which he was satisfied could be bought for three and a half. So I went with him to look at them. They proved to be showy enough, if that were any recommendation, but had a common look in my eyes. They were not to be compared with the set we had just been examining.

"Now, are they not very beautiful, Jane?" said my husband. To me they are quite as handsome as those we were asked sixty dollars for."

From this I could not but dissent, seeing which, the cunning dealer came quickly to my husband's side of the question with various convincing arguments, among the strongest of which was an abatement in the price of the chairs—he seeing it to be for his interest to offer them for three dollars and three-quarters a-piece.

"I'll give you three and a-half," said Mr. Smith, promptly.

"Too little, that, sir," returned the dealer. "I don't make a cent on them at three and three-quarters. They are fully equal, in every respect, to the chairs you were offered at five dollars. I know the manufacturer, and have had his articles often."

"Say three and a-half, and its a bargain," was the only reply made to this by my economical husband.

I was greatly in hopes that the man would decline this offer; but, was disappointed. He hesitated for some time, and, at last, said:

"Well, I don't care, take them along; though it is throwing them away. Such a bargain you

will never get again, if you live to be as old as Mathuselah. But, now, don't you want something else? I can sell you cheaper and better articles in the furniture line than you can get in the city. Small profits and quick sales—I go in for the nimble sixpence."

My husband was in the sphere of attraction, and I saw that it would take a stronger effort on my part to draw him out than I wished to make. So, I yielded with as good a grace as possible, and aided in the selection of a cheap sofa, a cheap, overgrown centre table, and two or three other article that were almost "thrown away."

Well, our parlor was furnished with its new dress in good time, and made quite a respectable appearance. Mr. Smith was delighted with everything; the more particularly as the cost had been so moderate. I had my own thoughts on the subject; and looked very confidently for some evidences of imperfection in our great bargains. I was not very long kept in suspense. One morning, about two weeks after all had been fitted out so elegantly, while engaged in dusting the chairs, a part of the mahogany ornament in the back of one of them fell off. On the next day, another showed the same evidence of imperfect workmanship. A few evenings afterwards, as we sat at the centre table, one of our children leaned on it rather heavily, when there was a sudden crack, and the side upon which he was bearing his weight, swayed down the distance of half an inch or more. The next untoward event was the dropping of one of its feet by the sofa, and the warping up of a large

piece of veneering on the back. While lamenting over this, we discovered a broken spring ready to make its way through the hair cloth covering.

"So much for cheap furniture," said I, in a tone of involuntary triumph.

My husband looked at me half reproachfully, and so I said no more.

It was now needful to send for a cabinet maker, and submit our sofa and chairs to his handy workmanship. He quickly discovered other imperfections, and gave us the consoling information that our fine furniture was little above fourth-rate in quality, and dear at any price. A ten dollar bill was required to pay the damage they had already sustained, even under our careful hands.

A more striking evidence of our folly in buying cheap furniture was, however, yet to come. An intimate friend came in one evening to sit a few hours with us. After conversing for a time, both he and my husband took up books, and commenced reading, while I availed myself of the opportunity to write a brief letter. Our visitor, who was a pretty stout man, had the bad fault of leaning back in his chair, and balancing himself on its hind legs; an experiment most trying to the best mahogahy chairs that were ever made.

We were all sitting around the centre table, upon which burned a tall astral lamp, and I was getting absorbed in my letter, when suddenly there was a loud crash, followed by the breaking of the table from its centre, and the pitching

over of the astral lamp, which, in falling, just grazed my side, and went down, oil and all, upon our new carpet! An instant more, and we were in total darkness. But, ere the light went out, a glance had revealed a scene that I shall never forget. Our visitor, whose weight, as he tried his usual balancing experiment, had caused the slender legs of his chair to snap off short, had fallen backwards. In trying to save himself, he had caught at the table, and wrenched that from its centre fastening. Startled by this sudden catastrophe, my husband had sprung to his feet, grasping his chair with the intent of drawing it away, when the top of the back came off in his hand. I saw all this at a single glance—and then we were shrouded in darkness.

Of the scene that followed, I will not speak. My lady readers can, witout any effort of the mind, imagine something of its unpleasant reality. As for our visitor, when lights were brought in, he was no where to be seen. I have a faint recollection of having heard the street door shut amid the confusion that succeeded the incident just described.

About a week afterwards, the whole of our cheap furniture was sent to auction, where it brought less than half its first cost. It was then replaced with good articles, by good workmen, at a fair price; not one of which has cost us, to this day, a single cent for repairs.

A housekeeping friend of mine, committed, not long since, a similar error. Her husband could spare her a couple of hundred dollars for re-furnishing purposes; but, as his business absorbed

nearly all of his time and thoughts, he left with her the selection of the new articles that were to beautify their parlors and chambers, merely saying to her:

"Let what you get be good. It is cheapest in the end."

Well, my friend had set her heart on a dozen chairs, a new sofa, centre table, and "what-not," for her parlors; and on a dressing-bureau, mahogany bedstead, and wash-stand, for her chamber, besides a new chamber carpet. Her first visit was to the ware-rooms of one of our best cabinet makers; but, his prices completely frightened her—for, at his rate, the articles she wanted would amount to more than all the money she had to spend, and leave nothing for the new chamber carpet.

"I must buy cheaper," said she.

"The cheapest is generally dearest in the end," returned the cabinet maker.

"I don't know about that," remarked the lady, whose thoughts did not take in the meaning of the man's words. "All I know is, that I can get as good articles as I desire at lower prices than you ask."

It did not once occur to my friend, that it would be wisest to lessen the number of articles, and get the remainder of the first quality. No; her heart covered the whole inventory at first made out, and nothing less would answer. So she went to an auction store, and bought inferior articles at lower prices. I visited her soon after. She showed me her bargains, and, with an air of exultation, spoke of the cost.

"What do you think I paid for this?" said she, referring to a showy dressing-bureau; and, as she spoke, she took hold of the suspended looking-glass, and moved the upper portion of it forward. "Only seventeen dollars!"

The words had scarcely passed her lips, ere the looking-glass broke away from one of the screws that held it in the standards, and fell, crashing, at our feet!

It cost just seven dollars to replace the glass. But, that was not all—over thirty dollars were paid during the first year for repairs. And this is only the beginning of troubles.

Cheap furniture is, in most cases, the dearest that housekeepers can buy. It is always breaking, and usually costs more, in a year or two, than the difference between its price and that of first-rate articles; to say nothing of the vexation and want of satisfaction that always attends its possession. Better be content with fewer articles, if the purse be low, and have them good.

While on this subject, I will incorporate in these "Confessions" an "Experience" of my sister and her husband, Mr. and Mrs. John Jones. Mr. Jones is, in some respects, very much like Mr. Smith, and, as will be seen in the story about to be given, my sister's ideas of things and my own, run quite parallel to each other. The story has found its way, elsewhere, into print, for Mr. Jones, like myself, has a natural fondness for types. But its repetition here will do no harm, and bring it before many who would not otherwise see it.

CHAPTER V.

IS IT ECONOMY?

THE "Experience" of my relative, Mr. John Jones, referred to in the preceding chapter, is given in what follows. After reading it, we think that few young housekeepers will commit the folly of indulging to any very great extent in cheap furniture.

We had been married five years, and during the time had boarded for economy's sake. But the addition of one after another to our family, admonished us that it was getting time to enlarge our borders; and so we were determined to go to housekeeping. In matters of domestic economy both my wife and myself were a little "green," but I think that I was the greenest of the two.

To get a house was our first concern, and to select furniture was our next. The house was found after two months' diligent search, and at the expense of a good deal of precious shoe leather. Save me from another siege at house-hunting! I would about as soon undertake to build a suitable dwelling with my own hands, as to find one "exactly the thing" already up, and waiting with open doors for a tenant. All the really desirable houses that we found ticketed

"to let," were at least two prices above our limit, and most of those within our means we would hardly have lived in rent free.

At last, however, we found a cosey little nest of a house, just built, and clean and neat as a new pin, from top to bottom. It suited us to a T. And now came the next most important business—selecting furniture. My wife's ideas had always been a little in advance of mine. That is, she liked to have every thing of the best quality; and had the weakness, so to speak, of desiring to make an appearance. As my income, at the time, was but moderate, and the prospect of an increase thereof not very flattering, I felt like being exceedingly prudent in all outlays for furniture.

"We must be content with things few and plain," said I, as we sat down one morning to figure up what we must get.

"But let them be good," said my wife.

"Strong and substantial," was my reply. "But we can't afford to pay for much extra polish and filagree work."

"I don't want any thing very extra, Mr. Jones," returned my wife, a little uneasily. "Though what I do have, I would like good. It's no economy, in the end, to buy cheap things."

The emphasis on the word cheap, rather grated on my ear; for I was in favor of getting every thing as cheap as possible.

"What kind of chairs did you think of getting?" asked Mrs. Jones.

"A handsome set of cane-seat," I replied,

thinking that in this, at least, I would be even with her ideas on the subject of parlor chairs.

But her face did not brighten.

"What would you like?" said I.

"I believe it would be more economical in the end to get good stuffed seat, mahogany chairs," replied Mrs. Jones.

"At five dollars a-piece, Ellen?"

"Yes. Even at five dollars a-piece. They would last us our life-time; while cane-seat chairs, if we get them, will have to be renewed two or three times, and cost a great deal more in the end, without being half so comfortable, or looking half-so well."

"Sixty dollars for a dozen chairs, when very good ones can be had for twenty-four dollars! Indeed, Ellen, we mustn't think of such a thing. We can't afford it. Remember, there are a great many other things to buy."

"I know, dear; but I am sure it will be much more economical in the end for us to diminish the number of articles, and add to the quality of what we do have. I am very much like the poor woman who preferred a cup of clear, strong, fragrant coffee, three times a week, to a decoction of burnt rye every day. What I have, I do like good."

"And so do I, Ellen. But, as I said before, there will be, diminish as we may, a great many things to buy, and we must make the cost of each as small as possible. We must not think of such extravagance as mahogany chairs now. At some other time we may get them."

My wife here gave up the point, and, what I

thought a little remarkable, made no more points on the subject of furniture. I had every thing my own way; I bought cheap to my heart's content. It was only necessary for me to express my approval of an article, for her to assent to its purchase.

As to patronizing your fashionable cabinet makers and high-priced upholsterers, we were not guilty of the folly, but bought at reasonable rates from auction stores and at public sales. Our parlor carpets cost but ninety cents a yard, and were handsomer than those for which a lady of our acquaintance paid a dollar and thirty-eight. Our chairs were of a neat, fancy pattern, and had cost thirty dollars a dozen. We had hesitated for some time between a set at twenty-four dollars a dozen and these; but the style being so much more attractive, we let our taste govern in the selection. The price of our sofa was eighteen dollars, and I thought it a really genteel affair, though my wife was not in raptures about it. A pair of card tables for fifteen dollars, and a marble-top centre table for fourteen, gave our parlors quite a handsome appearance.

"I wouldn't ask any thing more comfortable or genteel than this," said I, when the parlors were all "fixed" right.

Mrs. Jones looked pleased with the appearance of things, but did not express herself extravagantly.

In selecting our chamber furniture, a handsome dressing-bureau and French bedstead that my wife went to look at in the ware-room of a high-priced cabinet maker, tempted her strongly,

and it was with some difficulty that I could get her ideas back to a regular maple four-poster, a plain, ten dollar bureau, and a two dollar dressing-glass. Twenty and thirty dollar mattresses, too, were in her mind, but when articles of the kind, just as good to wear, could be had at eight and ten dollars, where was the use of wasting money in going higher?

The ratio of cost set down against the foregoing articles, was maintained from garret to kitchen; and I was agreeably disappointed to find, after the last bill for purchases was paid, that I was within the limit of expenditures I had proposed to make by over a hundred dollars.

The change from a boarding-house to a comfortable home was, indeed, pleasant. We could never get done talking about it. Every thing was so quiet, so new, so clean, and so orderly.

"This is living," would drop from our lips a dozen times a week.

One day, about three months after we had commenced housekeeping, I came home, and, on entering the parlor, the first thing that met my eyes was a large spot of white on the new sofa. A piece of the veneering had been knocked off, completely disfiguring it.

"What did that?" I asked of my wife.

"In setting back a chair that I had dusted," she replied, "one of the feet touched the sofa lightly, when off dropped that veneer like a loose flake. I've been examining the sofa since, and find that it is a very bad piece of work. Just look here."

And she drew me over to the place where my

eighteen dollar sofa stood, and pointed out sundry large seams that had gaped open, loose spots in the veneering, and rickety joints. I saw now, what I had not before seen, that the whole article was of exceedingly common material and common workmanship.

"A miserable piece of furniture!" said I.

"It is, indeed," returned Mrs. Jones. "To buy an article like this, is little better than throwing money into the street."

For a month the disfigured sofa remained in the parlor, a perfect eye-sore, when another piece of the veneering sloughed off, and one of the feet became loose. It was then sent to a cabinet maker for repair; and cost for removing and mending just five dollars.

Not long after this, the bureau had to take a like journey, for it had, strangely enough, fallen into sudden dilapidation. All the locks were out of order, half the knobs were off, there was not a drawer that didn't require the most accurate balancing of forces in order to get it shut after it was once open, and it showed premonitory symptoms of shedding its skin like a snake. A five dollar bill was expended in putting this into something like *usable* order and respectable aspect. By this time a new set of castors was needed for the maple four-poster, which was obtained at the expense of two dollars. Moreover, the head-board to said four-poster, which, from its exceeding ugliness, had, from the first, been a terrible eye-sore to Mrs. Jones, as well as to myself, was, about this period, removed, and one of more sightly appearance substituted, at the

additional charge of six dollars. No tester frame had accompanied the cheap bedstead at its original purchase, and now my wife wished to have one, and also a light curtain above and valance below. All these, with trimmings, etc., to match, cost the round sum of ten dollars.

"It looks very neat," said Mrs. Jones, after her curtains were up.

"It does, indeed," said I.

"Still," returned Mrs. Jones, "I would much rather have had a handsome mahogany French bedstead."

"So would I," was my answer. "But you know they cost some thirty dollars, and we paid but sixteen for this."

"Sixteen!" said my wife, turning quickly toward me. "It cost more than that."

"Oh, no. I have the bill in my desk," was my confident answer.

"Sixteen was originally paid, I know," said Mrs. Jones. "But then, remember, what it has cost since. Two dollars for castors, six for a new head-board, and ten for tester and curtains. Thirty-four dollars in all; when a very handsome French bedstead, of good workmanship, can be bought for thirty dollars."

I must own that I was taken somewhat aback by this array of figures "that don't lie."

"And for twenty dollars we could have bought a neat, well made dressing-bureau, at Moore and Campion's, that would have lasted for twice as many years, and always looked in credit."

"But ours, you know, only cost ten," said I.

"The bureau, such as it is, cost ten, and the

glass two. Add five that we have already paid for repairs, and the four that our maple bedstead has cost above the price of a handsome French one, and we will have the sum of twenty-one dollars,—enough to purchase as handsome a dressing-bureau as I would ask. So you see, Mr. Jones, that our cheap furniture is not going to turn out so cheap after all. And as for looks, why no one can say there is much to brag of."

This was a new view of the case, and certainly one not very flattering to my economical vanity. I gave in, of course, and admitted that Mrs. Jones was right.

But the dilapidations and expenses for repairs, to which I have just referred, were but as the "beginning of sorrows." It took about three years to show the full fruits of my error. By the end of that time, half my parlor chairs had been rendered useless in consequence of the back-breaking and seat-rending ordeals through which they had been called to pass. The sofa was unanimously condemned to the dining room, and the ninety cent carpet had gone on fading and defacing, until my wife said she was ashamed to put it even on her chambers. For repairs, our furniture had cost, up to this period, to say nothing of the perpetual annoyance of having it put out of order, and running for the cabinet maker and upholsterer, not less than a couple of hundred dollars.

Finally, I grew desperate.

"I'll have decent, well made furniture, let it cost what it will," said I, to Mrs. Jones.

"You will find it cheapest in the end," was her quiet reply.

On the next day we went to a cabinet maker, whose reputation for good work stood among the highest in the city; and ordered new parlor and chamber furniture—mahogany chairs, French bedstead, dressing-bureau and all, and as soon as they came home, cleared the house of all the old cheap (dear!) trash with which we had been worried since the day we commenced housekeeping.

A good many years have passed since, and we have not paid the first five dollar bill for repairs. All the drawers run as smoothly as railroad cars; knobs are tight; locks in prime order, and veneers cling as tightly to their places as if they had grown there. All is right and tight, and wears an orderly, genteel appearance; and what is best of all, the cost of every thing we have, good as it is, is far below the *real* cost of what is inferior.

"It is better—much better," said I to Mrs. Jones, the other day.

"Better!" was her reply. "Yes, indeed, a thousand times better to have good things at once. Cheap furniture is dearest in the end. Every housekeeper ought to know this in the beginning. If we had known it, see what we would have saved."

"If *I* had known it, you mean," said I.

My wife looked kindly, not triumphantly, into my face, and smiled. When she again spoke, it was on another subject.

CHAPTER VI.

LIVING AT A CONVENIENT DISTANCE.

THERE are few of us who do not feel, at some time in life, the desire for change. Indeed, change of place corresponding, as it does, in outward nature, to change of state in the mind, it is not at all surprising that we should, now and then, feel a strong desire to remove from the old, and get into new locations, and amid different external associations. Thus, we find, in many families, an ever recurring tendency to removal. Indeed, I have some housekeeping friends who are rarely to be found in the same house, or in the same part of the city, in any two consecutive years. Three moves, Franklin used to say, were equal to a fire. There are some to whom I could point, who have been, if this holds true, as good as burned out, three or four times in the last ten years.

But, I must not write too long a preface to my present story. Mr. Smith and myself cannot boast of larger organs of Inhabitativeness—I believe that is the word used by phrenologists—than many of our neighbors. Occasionally we have felt dissatisfied with the state of things around us, and become possessed of the demon of change. We have moved quite frequently, sometimes attaining superior comfort, and some

A CONVENIENT DISTANCE FROM THE CITY. (55)

times, getting rather the worst of it for "the change."

A few years ago, in the early spring-time, Mr. Smith said to me, one day:

"I noticed, in riding out yesterday, a very pleasant country house on the Frankford Road, to let, and it struck me that it would be a fine thing for us, both as to health and comfort, to rent it for the summer season. What do you think of it?"

"I always loved the country, you know," was my response.

My heart had leaped at the proposition.

"It is such a convenient distance from the city," said Mr. Smith.

"How far?"

"About four miles."

"Do the stages pass frequently?"

"Every half hour; and the fare is only twelve and a half cents."

"So low! That is certainly an inducement."

"Yes, it is. Suppose we go out and look at the house?"

"Very well," said I. And then we talked over the pleasures and advantage that would result from a residence in the country, at such a convenient distance from the city.

"On the next day we went to look at the place, and found much, both in the house and grounds, to attract us. There was a fine shaded lawn, and garden with a stock of small and large fruit.

"What a delightful place for the children," I exclaimed.

'And at such a convenient distance from the city," said my husband. "I can go in and out to business, and scarcely miss the time. But do you think you would like the country?"

"O, yes. I've always loved the country."

"We can move back into the city when the summer closes," said Mr. Smith.

"Why not remain here permanently? It will be too expensive to keep both a city and country house," I returned.

"It will be too dreary through the winter."

"I don't think so. I always feel cheerful in the country. And, then, you know, the house is at such a convenient distance, and the stages pass the door at every half hour. You can get to business as easily as if we resided in the city."

I was in the mood for a change, and so it happened was Mr. Smith. The more we thought and talked about the matters, the more inclined were we to break up in the city, and go permanently to the country. And, finally, we resolved to try the experiment.

So the pleasant country house was taken, and the town house given up, and, in due time, we took our flight to where nature had just carpeted the earth in freshest green, and caused the buds to expand, and the trees of the forest to clothe themselves in verdure.

How pleasant was every thing. A gardener had been employed to put the garden and lawn in order, and soon we were delighted to see the first shoots from seeds that had been planted, making their way through the ground. To me,

all was delightful. I felt almost as light-hearted as a child, and never tired of expressing my pleasure at the change.

"Come and see us," said I, to one city friend and another, on meeting them. "We're in a most delightful place, and at such a convenient distance from the city. Just get into the Frankford omnibus, which starts from Hall's, in Second street above Market, every half hour, and you will come to our very door. And I shall be so delighted to have a visit from you."

In moving from the city, I took with me two good domestics, who had lived in my family for over a year. Each had expressed herself as delighted at the prospect of getting into the country, and I was delighted to think they were so well satisfied, for I had feared lest they would be disinclined to accompany us.

About a month after our removal, one of them, who had looked dissatisfied about something, came to me and said:

"I want to go back to the city, Mrs. Smith; I don't like living in the country."

"Very well," I replied. "You must do as you please. But I thought you preferred this to the city?"

"I thought I would like it, but I don't. It's too lonesome."

I did not persuade her to stay. That error I had once or twice, ere this, fallen into, and learned to avoid it in future. So she went back to the city, and I was left with but a single girl. Three days only elapsed before this one announced her intended departure.

"But you will stay," said I, "until I can get some one in your place."

"My week will be up on Saturday," was replied. "Can you get a girl by that time?"

"That leaves me only two days, Mary; I'm afraid not."

Mary looked unamiable enough at this answer. We said no more to each other. In the afternoon I went to the city to find a new domestic, if possible, but returned unsuccessful.

Saturday came, and to my surprise and trouble, Mary persisted in going away. So I was left, with my family of six persons, without any domestic at all.

Sunday proved to me any thing but a day of rest. After washing and dressing the children, preparing breakfast, clearing away the table, making the beds, and putting the house to order, I set about getting dinner. This meal furnished and eaten, and the dishes washed and put away, I found myself not only completely tired out, but suffering from a most dreadful headache. I was lying down, about four o'clock, in a half-waking and sleeping state, with my head a little easier, when my husband, who was sitting by the window, exclaimed:

"If there isn't Mr. and Mrs. Peters and their three children, getting out of the stage!"

"Not coming here!" said I, starting up in bed, while, at the same moment, my headache returned with a throbbing intensity that almost blinded me.

"Yes, coming here," replied Mr. Smith.

"How unfortunate!" came from my lips, as I clasped my hands to my temples.

Now, Mr. and Mrs. Peters were people for whom we had no particular friendship. We visited each other scarcely once a year, and had never reciprocated an evening to tea. True, I had, on the occasion of meeting Mrs. Peters, about a week before, while stopping in the city, said to her, while praising my new country home:

"You must come and see me sometime during the summer."

The invitation was intended as a compliment more than anything else. I didn't particularly care about a visit from her; and certainly had no idea that she would take me at my word. So much for insincerity.

"Go down and ask them into the parlor," said I to Mr. Smith. "I will dress myself and join you in a little while."

In about half an hour I left my room, feeling really quite unwell. I found my visitors walking in the garden, and their children ranging about like wild colts, to the particular detriment of choice shrubbery and garden beds.

"Oh, what a delightful place!" exclaimed Mrs. Peters, on my meeting her. "I really envy you! You see that I have accepted your very kind invitation. I said to my husband to-day, says I, wouldn't it be nice to make the Smiths a visit this afternoon. They live at such a convenient distance; and it will be such a treat to the children. Well, just as you like, said Mr. Peters. And so, as soon as dinner was over, we got ready and came out. Oh, I'm delighted! What a

sweet spot you have chosen. I shall come and see you often."

And thus she run on, while I smiled, and responded with all due politeness, and to a certain extent, hypocritical pretence of pleasure at the visit.

They had come to spend the afternoon, and take tea with us, of course, and, as the last stage went by at seven o'clock, I was soon under the necessity of leaving my guests, in order to engage in certain preliminary acts that looked towards an early supper. Oh, how my head did throb; and with what an effort did I drag my weary feet about!

But, the longest trial—the most painful ordeal has an end; and the end of this came at length. Our visitors, after spending a few hours, and being served with tea, took their departure, assuring us, as they did so, that they had spent a delightful afternoon, and would be certain to come again soon.

In ten minutes after they had left the house, I was in bed.

Two whole weeks elapsed before I succeeded in getting a girl; and six times during that period, we had friends out from the city to take tea with us; and one young lady spent three whole days!

When the season of fruits came, as we had a few apple and pear trees, besides a strawberry bed, and a fine row of raspberry bushes, our city friends, especially those who had children, were even more particular in their attentions. Our own children, we could make understand the

propriety of leaving the small fruit to be picked for table use, so that all could share in its enjoyment. But, visitors' children comprehended nothing of this, and rifled our beds and bushes so constantly, that, although they would have given our table a fair supply of berries, in the season, we never once could get enough to be worth using, and so were forced to purchase our fruit in the city.

After a destructive visitation of this nature, during strawberry time, I said to Mr. Smith, as he was leaving for the city one morning—

"I wish you would take a small basket with you, and bring out two or three quarts of strawberries for tea. I've only tasted them once or twice, and it's hopeless to think of getting any from our garden."

Well, when Mr. Smith came home with his two or three quarts of strawberries, we had six women and children, visitors from the city, to partake of them. Of course, our own children, who had been promised strawberries at tea time, and who had been looking for them, did'nt get a taste.

And thus it happened over and over again.

As the weather grew warmer and warmer, particular friends whom we were glad to see, and friends, so called, into whose houses we had rarely, if ever ventured, came out to get a "mouthful of fresh air," and to "see something green." We lived at "such a convenient distance," that it was no trouble at all to run out and look at us.

Twice again during the summer, I was left

without a single domestic. Girls didn't like to leave the city, where they had been used to meeting their acquaintances every few days; and, therefore, it was hard to retain them. So it went on.

I had poor help, and was overrun with company, at such a rate, that I was completely worn out. I rarely heard the rumble of the approaching stage that I did not get nervous.

Early in August, Mr. Smith said to me, one evening after returning from the city—on that very morning, a family of four had left me, after staying three days—

"I met Mr. Gray this afternoon, and he told me that they were coming out to see you to-morrow. That he was going away for a while, and his wife thought that it would be such a pleasant time to redeem her promise of making you a visit."

"Oh dear! What next!" I exclaimed in a distressed voice. "Is there to be no end to this?"

"Not before frost, I presume," returned Mr. Smith, meaningly.

"I wish frost would come along quickly, then," was my response. "But how long is Mr. Gray going to be absent from home?"

"He didn't say."

"And we're to have his whole family, I suppose, during his absence."

"Doubtless."

"Well, I call that taxing hospitality and good feeling a little too far. I don't want them here! I've no room for them without inconvenience to ourselves. Besides, my help is poor."

But, all my feelings of repugnance were of no avail. As I was sitting, on the next day, by a window, that overlooked the road, I saw the stage draw up, and issue therefrom Mr. Jones, Mrs. Jones, servant and five children—two of the latter twin-babies. They had boxes, carpet bags, bundles, &c., indicating a prolonged sojourn, and one little boy dragged after him a pet dog, that came also to honor us with a visit.

Down to meet them at the door, with as good a grace as possible, I hurried. Words of welcome and pleasure were on my tongue, though I am not sure that my face did not belie my utterance. But, they were all too pleased to get into our snug country quarters, to perceive any drawback in their reception.

I will not describe my experience during the next three weeks—for, Mr. Gray took the tour of the Lakes before returning, and was gone full three weeks, leaving his family to our care for the whole time.

"Heaven be praised, that is over!" was my exclamation, when I saw the stage move off that bore them from our door.

Frost at length came, and with it expired the visiting season. We were still at a convenient distance from the city; but, our friends, all at once, seemed to have forgotten us.

"You are not going to move back, now," said a friend in surprise, to whom I mentioned in the following March our intention to return to the city.

"Yes," I replied.

"Just as spring is about opening? Why,

surely, after passing the dreary winter in the country, you will not come to the hot and dusty town to spend the summer? You are at such a convenient distance too; and your friends can visit you so easily."

Yes, the distance was convenient; and we had learned to appreciate that advantage. But back to the city we removed; and, when next we venture to the country, will take good care to get beyond a *convenient distance.*

A PLAIN FAMILY DINNER.

CHAPTER VII.

THE PICKED-UP DINNER.

It was "washing day;" that day of all days in the week most dreaded by housekeepers. We had a poor breakfast, of course. Cook had to help with the washing, and, as washing was *the* important thing for the day, every thing else was doomed to suffer. The wash kettle was to her of greater moment than the tea kettle or coffee pot; and the boiling of wash water first in consideration, compared with broiling the steak.

The breakfast bell rung nearly half an hour later than usual. As I entered the dining room, I saw that nearly every thing was in disorder, and that the table was little over half set. Scarcely had I taken my seat, ere the bell was in my hand.

"There's no sugar on the table, Kitty."

These were my words, as the girl entered, in obedience to my summons.

"Oh, I forgot!" she ejaculated, and hurriedly supplied the deficiency.

Ting-a-ling-a-ling, went my bell, ere she had reached the kitchen.

"There's no knife and fork for the steak," said I, as Kitty re-appeared.

The knife and fork were furnished, but not with a very amiable grace.

"What's the matter with this coffee?" asked Mr. Smith, after sipping a spoonful or two. "It's got a queer taste."

"I'm sure I don't know."

It was plain that I was going to have another trying day; and I began to feel a little worried. My reply was not, therefore, made in a very composed voice.

Mr. Smith continued to sip his coffee with a spoon, and to taste the liquid doubtingly. At length he pushed his cup from him, saying:

"It's no use; I can't drink that! I wish you would just taste it. I do believe Kitty has dropped a piece of soap into the coffee pot."

By this time I had turned out a cup of the fluid for myself, and proceeded to try its quality. It certainly had a queer taste; but, as to the substance to which it was indebted for its peculiar flavor, I was in total ignorance. My husband insisted that it was soap. I thought differently; but we made no argument on the subject.

The steak was found, on trial, to be burned so badly that it was not fit to be eaten. And my husband had to make his meal of bread and butter and cold water. As for myself, this spoiling of our breakfast for no good reason, completely destroyed both my appetite and my temper.

"You'd better get your dinner at an eating house, Mr. Smith," said I, as he arose from the table. "It's washing day, and we shall have nothing comfortable."

"Things will be no more comfortable for you than for me," was kindly replied by my husband.

"We shall only have a picked-up dinner," said I.

"I like a good picked-up dinner," answered Mr. Smith. "There is something so out of the ordinary routine of ribs, loins, and sirloins—something so comfortable and independent about it. No, you cannot eat your picked-up dinner alone."

"Drop the word *good* from your description, and the picked-up dinner will be altogether another affair," said I. "No, don't come home to-day, if you please; for every thing promises to be most uncomfortable. Get yourself a good dinner at an eating house, and leave me to go through the day as well as I can."

"And you are really in earnest?" said my husband, seriously.

"I certainly am," was my reply. "Entirely in earnest. So, just oblige me by not coming home to dinner."

Mr. Smith promised; and there was so much off of my mind. I could not let him come home without seeing that he had a good dinner. But, almost any thing would do for me and the children.

In some things, I am compelled to say that my husband is a little uncertain. His memory is not always to be depended on. Deeply absorbed in business, as he was at that time, he frequently let things of minor importance pass from his thoughts altogether.

So it happened on the present occasion. He forgot that it was washing day, and that he had promised to dine down town. Punctually at half-

past one he left his place of business, as usual, and took his way homeward. As he walked along, he met an old friend who lived in a neighboring town, and who was on a visit to our city.

"Why, Mr. Jones! How glad I am to see you! When did you arrive?"

And my husband grasped the hand of his friend eagerly.

"Came in last evening," replied Mr. Jones. "How well you look, Smith! How is your family?"

"Well—very well. When do you leave?"

"By this afternoon's line."

"So soon? You make no stay at all?"

"I came on business, and must go back again with as little delay as possible."

"Then you must go and dine with me, Jones. I won't take no for an answer. Want to have a long talk with you about old times."

"Thank you, Mr. Smith," replied Jones. "But, as I don't happen to know your good lady, I hardly feel free to accept your invitation."

"Don't hesitate for that. She'll be delighted to see you. Always glad to meet any of my old friends. So come along. I've a dozen things to say to you."

"I'm really afraid of intruding on your wife," said Mr. Jones, still holding back from the invitation.

"Nonsense!" answered my husband. "My friends are her's. She will be delighted to see you. I've talked of you to her a hundred times."

At this Mr. Jones yielded.

"I can't promise you any thing extra," said Mr. Smith, as they walked along. "Nothing more than a good, plain family dinner, and a warm welcome."

"All I could ask or desire," returned Mr. Jones.

It was a few minutes to two o'clock. The bell had rung for dinner; and I was just rising to go to the dining room, when I heard the street door open, and the sound of my husband's voice in the passage. There was a man in company with him, for I distinctly heard the tread of a pair of feet. What could this mean? I remained seated, listening with attention.

My husband entered the parlor with his companion, talking in a cheerful, animated strain; and I heard him pull up the blinds and throw open the shutters. Presently he came tripping lightly up the stairs to my sitting room.

"I've brought a friend home to dinner, Jane," said he, as coolly and as confidently as if it were not washing day; and as if he had not told me on going out, that he would dine at an eating house.

This was a little too much for my patience and forbearance.

"Are you beside yourself, Mr. Smith?" I replied, my face instantly becoming flushed, and my eyes glancing out upon him the sudden indignation I felt at such treatment.

"Why, Jane! Jane! This is not kind in you," said my husband, with regret and displeasure in his voice. "It is rather hard if a man can't ask an old friend home to dine with

him once in five years, without asking the special permission of his wife."

"Mr. Smith! Are you not aware that this is washing day?"

There was an instant change in my husband's countenance. He seemed bewildered for a few moments.

"And, moreover," I continued, "are you not aware that I was to have a picked-up dinner at home, and that you were to dine at an eating house?"

"I declare!" Mr. Smith struck his hands together, and turned around once upon his heel. —"I entirely forgot about that."

"What's to be done?" said I, almost crying with vexation. "I've nothing for dinner but fried ham and eggs."

"The best we can do is the best," returned Mr. Smith. "You can give Mr. Jones a hearty welcome, and that will compensate for any defects in the dinner. I forewarned him that we should not entertain him very sumptuously."

"You'd better tell him the whole truth at once," said I, in answer to this; "and then take him to an eating house."

But my good husband would hear to nothing of this. He had invited his old friend to dine with him; and dine he must, if it was only on a piece of dry bread.

"Pick up something. Do the best you can," he returned. "We can wait for half an hour."

"I've nothing in the house, I tell you," was my answer made in no very pleasant tones; for

I felt very much irritated and outraged by my husband's thoughtless conduct.

"There, there, Jane. Don't get excited about the matter," said he soothingly. But his words were not like oil to the troubled waters of my spirit.

"I am excited," was my response. "How can I help being so? It is too much! You should have had more consideration."

But, talking was of no use. Mr. Jones was in the parlor, and had come to take a family dinner with us. So, nothing was left but to put a good face on the matter; or, at least, to try and do so.

"Dinner's on the table now," said I. "All is there that we can have to-day. So just invite your friend to the dining room, where you will find me."

So saying, I took a little fellow by the hand, who always eat with us, and led him away, feeling, as my lady readers will very naturally suppose, in not the most amiable humor in the world. I had just got the child, who was pretty hungry, seated in his high chair, when my husband and his guest made their appearance; and I was introduced.

Sorry am I to chronicle the fact—but truth compels me to make a faithful record—that my reception of the stranger was by no means gracious. I tried to smile; but a smile was such a mockery of my real feelings, that every facial muscle refused to play the hypocrite. The man was not welcome, and it was impossible for me to conceal this.

"A plain family dinner, you see," said Mr.

Smith, as we took our places at the meagre board. "We are plain people. Shall I help you to some of the ham and eggs?"

He tried to smile pleasantly, and to seem very much at his ease. But, the attempt was far from successful.

"I want some! Don't give him all!" screamed out the hungry child at my side, stretching out his hands towards the poorly supplied dish, from which my husband was about supplying our guest.

My face, which was red enough before, now became like scarlet. A moment longer I remained at the table, and then rising up quickly took the impatient child in my arms, and carried him screaming from the room. I did not return to grace the dinner table with my unattractive presence. Of what passed, particularly, between my husband and his friend Mr. Jones, who had left his luxurious dinner at the hotel to enjoy "a plain family dinner" with his old acquaintance, I never ventured to make enquiry. They did not remain very long at the table; nor very long in the house after finishing their frugal meal.

I have heard since that Mr. Jones has expressed commiseration for my husband, as the married partner of a real termigant. I don't much wonder at his indifferent opinion; for, I rather think I must have shown in my face something of the indignant fire that was in me.

Mr. Smith, who was too much in the habit of inviting people home to take a "family dinner" with him on the spur of the moment, has never committed that error since. His mortification was too severe to be easily forgotten.

CHAPTER VIII.

WHO IS KRISS KRINGLE?

It was the day before Christmas—always a day of restless, hopeful excitement among the children; and my thoughts were busy, as is usual at this season, with little plans for increasing the gladness of my happy household. The name of the good genius who presides over toys and sugar plums was often on my lips, but oftener on the lips of the children.

"Who is Kriss Kringle, mamma?" asked a pair of rosy lips, close to my ear, as I stood at the kitchen table, rolling out and cutting cakes.

I turned at the question, and met the earnest gaze of a couple of bright eyes, the roguish owner of which had climbed into a chair for the purpose of taking note of my doings.

I kissed the sweet lips, but did not answer.

"Say, mamma? Who is Kriss Kringle?" persevered the little one.

"Why, don't you know?" said I, smiling.

"No, mamma. Who is he?"

"Why, he is—he is—Kriss Kringle."

"Oh, mamma! Say, won't you tell me?"

"Ask papa when he comes home," I returned, evasively.

I never like deceiving children in any thing. And yet, Christmas after Christmas, I have im-

posed on them the pleasant fiction of Kriss Kringle, without suffering very severe pangs of conscience. Dear little creatures! how fully they believed, at first, the story; how soberly and confidingly they hung their stockings in the chimney corner; with what faith and joy did they receive their many gifts on the never-to-be-forgotten Christmas morning!

Yes, it is a pleasant fiction; and if there be in it a leaven of wrong, it is indeed a small portion.

"But why won't you tell me, mamma?" persisted my little interrogator. "Don't you know Kriss Kringle?"

"I never saw him, dear," said I.

"Has papa seen him?"

"Ask him when he comes home."

"I wish Krissy would bring me, Oh, such an elegant carriage and four horses, with a driver that could get down and go up again."

"If I see him, I'll tell him to bring you just such a nice carriage."

"And will he do it, mamma?" The dear child clapped his hands together with delight.

"I guess so."

"I wish I could see him," he said, more soberly and thoughtfully. And then, as if some new impression had crossed his mind, he hastened down from the chair, and went gliding from the room.

Half an hour afterwards, as I came into the nursery, I saw my three "olive branches," clustered together in a corner, holding grave counsel on some subject of importance; at least to them-

selves. They became silent at my presence; but soon began to talk aloud. I listened to a few words, but perceived nothing of particular concern; then turned my thoughts away.

"Who is Kriss Kringle, papa?" I heard my cherry-lipped boy asking of Mr. Smith, soon after he came home in the evening.

The answer I did not hear. Enough that the enquirer did not appear satisfied therewith.

At tea-time, the children were not in very good appetite, though in fine spirits.

As soon as the evening meal was over, Mr. Smith went out to buy presents for our little ones, while I took upon myself the task of getting them off early to bed.

A Christmas tree had been obtained during the day, and it stood in one of the parlors, on a table. Into this parlor the good genius was to descend during the night, and hang on the branches of the tree, or leave upon the table, his gifts for the children. This was our arrangement. The little ones expressed some doubts as to whether Kriss Kringle would come to this particular room; and little "cherry lips" couldn't just see how the genius was going to get down the chimney, when the fire-place was closed up.

"Never mind, love; Kriss will find his way here," was my answer to all objections.

"But how do you know, mother? Have you sent him word?"

"Oh, I know."

Thus I put aside their enquiries, and hurried them off to bed

"Now go to sleep right quickly," said I, after

they were snugly under their warm blankets and comforts; "and to-morrow morning be up bright and early."

And so I left them to their peaceful slumbers.

An hour it was, or more, ere Mr. Smith returned, with his pockets well laden. I was in the parlor, where we had placed the Christmas tree, engaged in decorating it with rosettes, sugar toys, and the like. At this work I had been some fifteen or twenty minutes, and had, I will own, become a little nervous. My domestic had gone out, and I was alone in the house. Once or twice, as I sat in the silent room, I imagined that I heard a movement in the one adjoining. And several times I was sure that my ear detected something like the smothered breathing of a man.

"All imagination," said I to myself. But again and again the same sounds stirred upon the silent air.

"Could there be a robber concealed in the next room?"

The thought made me shudder. I was afraid to move from where I sat. What a relief when I heard my husband's key in the door, followed by the sound of his well known tread in the passage! My fears vanished in a moment.

As Mr. Smith stood near me, in the act of unloading his pockets, he bent close to my ear and whispered:

"Will is under the table. I caught a glance of his bright eyes, just now."

"What!"

"It's true. And the other little rogues are in

the next room, peeping through the door, at this very moment."

I was silent with surprise.

"They're determined to know who Kriss Kringle is," added my husband; then speaking aloud, he said:

"Come, dear, I want to show you something up in the dining-room."

I understood Mr. Smith, and arose up instantly, not so much as glancing towards the partly opened folding door.

We were hardly in the dining room before we heard the light pattering of feet, and low, smothered tittering on the stairway. Then all was still, and we descended to the parlors again, quite as much pleased with what had occurred as the little rogues were themselves.

"I declare! Really, I thought them all sound asleep an hour ago," said I, on resuming my work of decorating the Christmas tree. "Who could have believed them cunning enough for this? It's all Will's doings. He'll get through the world."

"Aye will he," returned Mr. Smith. "Oh! if you could have seen his face as I saw it, just peering from under the table cloth, his eyes as bright as stars, and full of merriment and delight."

"Bless his heart! He's a dear little fellow!"

How could I help saying this?

"And the others! You lost half the pleasure of the whole affair by not seeing them."

"We shall have a frolic with the rogues tomorrow morning. I can see the triumph on

Will's face. I understand now what all their whisperings meant this afternoon. They were concocting this plan. I couldn't have believed it of them?"

"Children are curious bodies," said Mr. Smith.

"I thought I heard some one in the next room," I remarked, "while you were out, and became really nervous for a while. I heard the breathing of some one near me, also; but tried to argue myself into the belief that it was only imagination."

Thus we conned over the little incident, while we arranged the children's toys.

"I know who Kriss Kringle is! I know!" was the triumphant affirmation of one and another of the children, as we gathered at the breakfast table next morning.

"Do you, indeed?" said I, trying to look grave.

"Yes; it is papa."

"Papa, Kriss Kringle! How can that be?"

"Oh, we know! We found out!"

"Indeed!"

And we made, of course, a great wonder of this assertion. The merry elves! What a happy Christmas it was for them. Ever since, they have dated from the time when they found out who Kriss Kringle was. It is all to no purpose that we pleasantly suggest the possibility of their having dreamed of what they allege to have occurred under their actual vision; they have recorded it in their memories, and refer to it as a veritable fact.

Dear children! How little they really ask of us, to make them happy. Did we give them but

a twentieth part of the time we devote to business, care, and pleasure, how greatly would we promote their good, and increase the measure of their enjoyment. Not alone at Christmas time, but all the year should we remember and care for their pleasures; for, the state of innocent pleasure, in children, is one in which good affections are implanted, and these take root and grow, and produce fruit in after life.

CHAPTER IX.

NOT AT HOME.

NEVER but once did I venture upon the utterance of that little white lie, "Not at home," and then I was well punished for my weakness and folly. It occurred at a time when there were in my family two new inmates: a niece from New York, and a raw Irish girl that I had taken a few days before, on trial.

My niece, Agnes, was a young lady in her nineteenth year, the daughter of my brother. I had not seen her before since her school-girl days; and knew little of her character. Her mother I had always esteemed as a right-thinking, true-hearted woman. I was much pleased to have a visit from Agnes, and felt drawn toward her more and more every day. There was something pure and good about her.

"Now, Aggy, dear," said I to her, one morning after breakfast, as we took our work and retired from the dining-room to one of the parlors, where I was occasionally in the habit of sitting, —"we must sew for dear life until dinner time, so as to finish these two frocks for the children to wear this evening. It isn't right, I know, to impose on you in this way. But you sew so quick and neatly; and then it will help me

NOT AT HOME.

through, and leave me free to visit Girard College with you this afternoon."

"Don't speak of it, aunt," returned Agnes.—"I'm never happier than when employed. And, besides, it's only fair that I should sew for you in the morning, if you are to go pleasuring with me in the afternoon."

Lightly the hours flew by, passed in cheerful conversation. I found that the mind of my niece had been highly cultivated; that her tastes were refined, and her moral sense acute. To say that I was pleased with her, would but half express what I felt.

There was to be a juvenile party at the house of one of our acquaintances that evening, to which the children were invited; and we were at work in preparing dresses and other matters suitable for them to appear in.

Twelve o'clock came very quickly—too quickly for me, in fact; for I had not accomplished near so much as I had hoped to do. It would require the most diligent application, through every moment of time that intervened until the dinner hour, for us to get through with what we were doing, so as to have the afternoon to ourselves for the intended excursion.

As the clock rung out the hour of noon, I exclaimed:

"Is it possible! I had no idea that it was so late. How slowly I do seem to get along!"

Just at this moment the bell rung.

"Bless me! I hope we are not to have visitors this morning," said I, as I let my hands fall in

my lap. I thought hurriedly for a moment, and then remarked, in a decided way:

"Of course we cannot see any one. We are engaged."

By this time I heard the footsteps of Mary on her way from the kitchen, and I very naturally passed quickly to the parlor door to intercept and give her my instructions.

"Say that I'm engaged," was on my tongue. But, somehow or other, I had not the courage to give these words utterance. The visitor might be a person to whom such an excuse for not appearing would seem unkind, or be an offence. In this uncertain state, my mind fell into confusion. Mary was before me, and awaiting the direction she saw that I was about giving.

"Say that I'm not at home, if any one asks to see me," came in a sudden impulse from my lips.

And then my cheeks flushed to think that I had instructed my servant to give utterance to a falsehood.

"Yes, mim," answered the girl, glancing into my face with a knowing leer, that produced an instant sense of humiliation; and away she went to do my bidding.

I did not glance towards Agnes, as I returned to my seat and took up my work. I had not the courage to do this. That I had lowered myself in her estimation, I felt certain.

I heard the street door open, and bent, involuntarily, in a listening attitude. The voice of a lady uttered my name.

"She's not at home, mim," came distinctly on

my ears, causing the flush on my cheeks to become still deeper.

A murmur of voices followed. Then I heard the closing of the vestibule door, and Mary returning to the back parlor where we were sitting.

"Who was it, Mary?" I enquired, as the girl entered.

"Mrs.—Mrs.—Now what was it? Sure, and I've forgotten their names intirely."

But, lack of memory did not long keep me in ignorance as to who were my visitors, for, as ill luck would have it, they had bethought themselves of some message they wished to leave, and, re-opening the vestibule door, left a-jar by Mary, followed her along the passage to the room they saw her enter. As they pushed open the door of the parlor, Mary heard them, and, turning quickly, exclaimed, in consternation—

"Och, murther!"

A moment she stood, confronting, in no very graceful attitude, a couple of ladies, and then escaped to the kitchen.

Here was a scene of embarrassment. Not among all my acquaintances were there, perhaps, two persons, whom I would have least desired to witness in me such a fault as the one of which I had been guilty. For a little while, I knew not what to say. I sat, overcome with mortification. At length, I arose, and said with an effort,

"Walk in, ladies! How are you this morning? I'm pleased to see you. Take chairs. My niece, Mrs. Williams, and Mrs. Glenn. I hope you will excuse us. We were—"

"Oh, no apologies, Mrs. Smith," returned one of the ladies, with a quiet smile, and an air of self-possession. "Pardon this intrusion. We understood the servant that you were not at home."

"Engaged, she meant," said I, a deeper crimson suffusing my face. "The fact is, we are working for dear life, to get the children ready for a party to night, and wished to be excused from seeing any one."

"Certainly—all right," returned Mrs. Williams, "I merely came in to say to your domestic (I had forgotten it at the door) that my sister expected to leave for her home in New York in a day or two, and would call here with me, to-morrow afternoon."

"I shall be very happy to see her," said I,—"very happy. Do come in and sit down for a little while. If I had only known it was you."

Now that last sentence, spoken in embarrassment and mental confusion, was only making matters worse. It placed me in a false and despicable light before my visitors; for in it was the savor of hypocrisy, which is foreign to my nature.

"No, thank you," replied my visitors. "Good morning!"

And they retired, leaving me so overcome with shame, mortification, confusion, and distress, that I burst into tears.

"To think that *I* should have done such a thing!" was my first remark, so soon as I had a little recovered my self-possession; and I looked up, half timidly, into the face of my niece. I shall not soon forget the expression of surprise

and pain that was in her fair young countenance. I had uttered a falsehood in her presence, and thus done violence to the good opinion she had formed of me. The beautiful ideal of her aunt, which had filled her mind, was blurred over; and her heart was sad in consequence.

"Dear Aggy!" said I, throwing my work upon the floor, and bending earnestly towards her.—"Don't think too meanly of me for this little circumstance. I never was guilty of that thing before—never! And well have I been punished for my thoughtless folly I spoke from impulse, and not reflection, when I told Mary to say that I was not at home, and repented of what I had done almost as soon as the words passed my lips."

Agnes looked at me for some moments, until her eyes filled with tears. Then she said in a low, sweet, earnest voice:

"Mother always says, if she cannot see any one who calls, that she is engaged."

"And so do I, dear," I returned. "This is my first offence against truth, and you may be sure that it will be the last."

And it was my last.

When next I met Mrs. Williams and Mrs. Glenn, there was, in both of them, a reserve not seen before. I felt this change keenly. I had wronged myself in their good opinion; and could not venture upon an explanation of my conduct; for that, I felt, might only make matters worse.

How often, since, has my cheek burned, as a vivid recollection came up before my mind of what occurred on that morning! I can never forget it.

CHAPTER X.

SHIRT BUTTONS.

In a previous chapter, I gave the reader one of the Experiences of my sister's husband, Mr. John Jones. I now give another.

There was a time in my married life, (thus Mr. Jones writes in one of *his* "Confessions,") when I was less annoyed if my bosom or wristband happened to be minus a button, than I am at present. But continual dropping will wear away a stone, and the ever recurring buttonless collar or wristband will wear out a man's patience, be he naturally as enduring as the Man of Uz.

I don't mean by this, that Mrs. Jones is a neglectful woman. Oh, no! don't let that be imagined for a moment. Mrs. Jones is a woman who has an eye for shirt buttons, and when that is said, a volume is told in a few words.

But I don't care how careful a wife is, nor how good an eye she may have for shirt buttons, there will come a time, when, from some cause or other, she will momentarily abate her vigilance, and that will be the very time when Betty's washing-board, or Nancy's sad-iron, has been at work upon the buttons.

For a year or two after our marriage, I used to express impatience, whenever, in putting on

a clean shirt, I found a button gone. Mrs. Jones bore this for a while without exhibiting much feeling. But it fretted her more than she permitted any one to see. At length, the constant recurrence of the evil—I didn't know as much then as I do now—annoyed me so that I passed from ejaculatory expressions of impatience into more decided and emphatic disapprobation, and to "Psha!" and "there it is again!" and the like were added:

"I declare, Mrs. Jones, this is too bad!" or

"I've given up hoping for a shirt with a full complement of buttons—" or

"If you can't sew the buttons on my shirt, Mrs. Jones, I will hire some one to do it."

This last expression of displeasure I never ventured upon but once. I have always felt ashamed of it since, whenever a recollection of my unreasonableness and impatience in the early times of the shirt button trouble has crossed my mind. My wife took it so much to heart, and so earnestly avowed her constant solicitude in regard to the shirt buttons, that I resolved from that time, to bear the evil like a man, and instead of grumbling or complaining, make known the fact of a deficiency whenever it occurred, as a good joke. And so for a year or so it used to be when the buttons were missing:

"Buttons again, Mrs. Jones;" or

"D'ye see that?" or

"Here's the old story"—

Always said laughingly, and varied as to the mood or fertility of fancy. But on so grave a subject as shirt buttons, Mrs. Jones had no heart

for a joke. The fact that her vigilance had proved all in vain, and that, spite of constant care, a shirt had found its way into my drawer, lacking its full complement of buttons, was something too serious for a smile or a jest, and my words, no matter how lightly spoken, would be felt as a reproof. Any allusion, therefore, to shirt buttons, was sure to produce a cloud upon the otherwise calm brow of Mrs. Jones. It was a sore subject, and could not be touched even by the light end of a feather without producing pain.

What was I to do? Put off with the lack of a shirt button uncomplainingly? Pin my collar, if the little circular piece of bone or ivory were gone, and not hint at the omission? Yes; I resolved not to say a word more about shirt buttons, but to bear the evil, whenever it occurred, with the patience of a martyr. Many days had not passed after this resolution was taken, before, on changing my linen one morning, I found that there was a button less than the usual number on the bosom of my shirt. Mrs. Jones had been up on the evening before, half an hour after I was in bed, looking over my shirts, to see if every thing was in order. But even her sharp eyes had failed to discover the place left vacant by a deserting member of the shirt button fraternity. I knew she had done her best, and I pitied, rather than blamed her, for I was sensible that a knowledge of the fact which had just come to light would trouble her a thousand times more than it did me.

The breakfast hour passed without a discovery

by Mrs. Jones of the fact that there was a button off of the bosom of my shirt. But, when I came in at dinner time, her first words, looking at me, were: "Why, Mr. Jones, there's a button off your bosom."

"I know," said I, indifferently. "It was off when I put the shirt on this morning. But it makes no difference—you can sew it on when the shirt next comes from the wash."

I was really sincere in what I said, and took some merit to myself for being as composed as I was on so agitating a subject. Judge of my surprise, then, to hear Mrs. Jones exclaim, with a flushed face, "Indeed, Mr. Jones, this is too much! no difference, indeed? A nice opinion people must have had of your wife, to see you going about with your bosom all gaping open in that style?"

"Nobody noticed it," said I in reply. "Don't you see that the edges lie perfectly smooth together, as much so as if held by a button?"

But it was no use to say anything; Mrs. Jones was hurt at my not speaking of the button.

"I'm sure," she said, "that I am always ready to do any thing for you. I never complain about sewing on your buttons."

"Nonsense, Mrs. Jones! don't take it so much to heart," I replied; "here, get your needle and thread, and you can have it all right in a minute. It's but a trifle—I'm sure I havn't thought about it since I put on the shirt this morning."

But all would not do—Mrs. Jones' grief was too real; and when I, losing to some extent, my patience, said fretfully, "I wish somebody would

invent a shirt without buttons," she sighed deeply, and in a little while I saw her handkerchief go quietly to her eyes. Again and again I tried the say-nothing plane; but it worked worse, if any thing, than the other; for Mrs. Jones was sure to find out the truth, and then she would be dreadfully hurt about my omission to speak.

And so the years have passed. Sometimes I fret a little when I find a shirt button off; sometimes I ask mildly to have the omission supplied when I discover its existence; sometimes I jest about it, and sometimes I bear the evil in silence. But the effects produced upon Mrs. Jones are about the same. Her equanimity of mind is disturbed, and she will look unhappy for hours. Never but once have I complained without a cause. But that one instance gave Mrs. Jones a triumph which has done much to sustain her in all her subsequent trials.

We had some friends staying with us, and among the various matters of discussion that came up during the social evenings we spent together, shirt buttons were, on one occasion, conspicuous. To record all that was said about them would fill pages, and I will not, therefore, attempt even a brief record of all the allegations brought against the useful little shirt button. The final decision was, that it must be the Apple of Discord in disguise.

"A button off, as usual!" I muttered to myself the next morning, as I put on a clean shirt. Mrs. Jones had risen half an hour before me, and was down stairs giving some directions about breakfast, so that I could not ask to have it sewed on.

And after leaving my room, I thought it as well not to say any thing about it. In due time we gathered with our friends around the breakfast table. A sight of them reminded me of the conversation the previous evening, and I felt an irresistible desire to allude to the missing shirt button as quite an apropos and amusing incident. So, speaking from the impulse of the moment, I said, glancing first at Mrs. Jones, then around the table, and then pointing down at my bosom, "The old story of shirt buttons again!"

Instantly the color mounted to the cheeks and brow of Mrs. Jones; then the color as quickly melted away, and a look of triumph passed over her face. She pushed back her chair quickly, and rising up, came round to where I sat, took hold of the button I had failed to see, and holding it between her fingers, said, "Oh, yes, this *is* the old story, Mr. Jones!"

I drew down my chin so as to get a low angle of vision, and sure enough, the button was there. A burst of laughter went around the table, in which Mrs. Jones most heartily joined; and I laughed, too, as glad as she was, that the joke was all on her side. I have never, you may be sure, heard the last of this; but it was a lucky incident, for it has given Mrs. Jones something to fall back upon, and have her jest occasionally, whenever I happen to discover that a button is among the missing, and that she can, even at times, find it in her heart to jest on such a subject, is, I can assure you, a great gain. So much for shirt buttons. I could say a great deal more, for the subject is inexhaustible. But I will forbear.

CHAPTER XI.

PAVEMENT WASHING IN WINTER.

Two weeks of spring-like weather in mid-winter, and then the thermometer went hurrying down towards zero with alarming rapidity. Evening closed in with a temperature so mild that fires were permitted to expire in the ashes; and morning broke with a cold nor-wester, whistling through every crack and cranny, in a tone that made you shrink and shiver.

"Winter at last," said I, creeping forth from my warm bed, with a very natural feeling of reluctance.

"Time," was the half asleep and half awake response of Mr. Smith, as he drew the clothes about his shoulders, and turned himself over for the enjoyment of his usual half hour morning nap.

It was Saturday—that busiest day in the seven; at least for housekeepers—and as late as half past seven o'clock, yet the house felt as cold as a barn. I stepped to the register to ascertain if the fire had been made in the heater. Against my hand came a pressure of air—cold air.

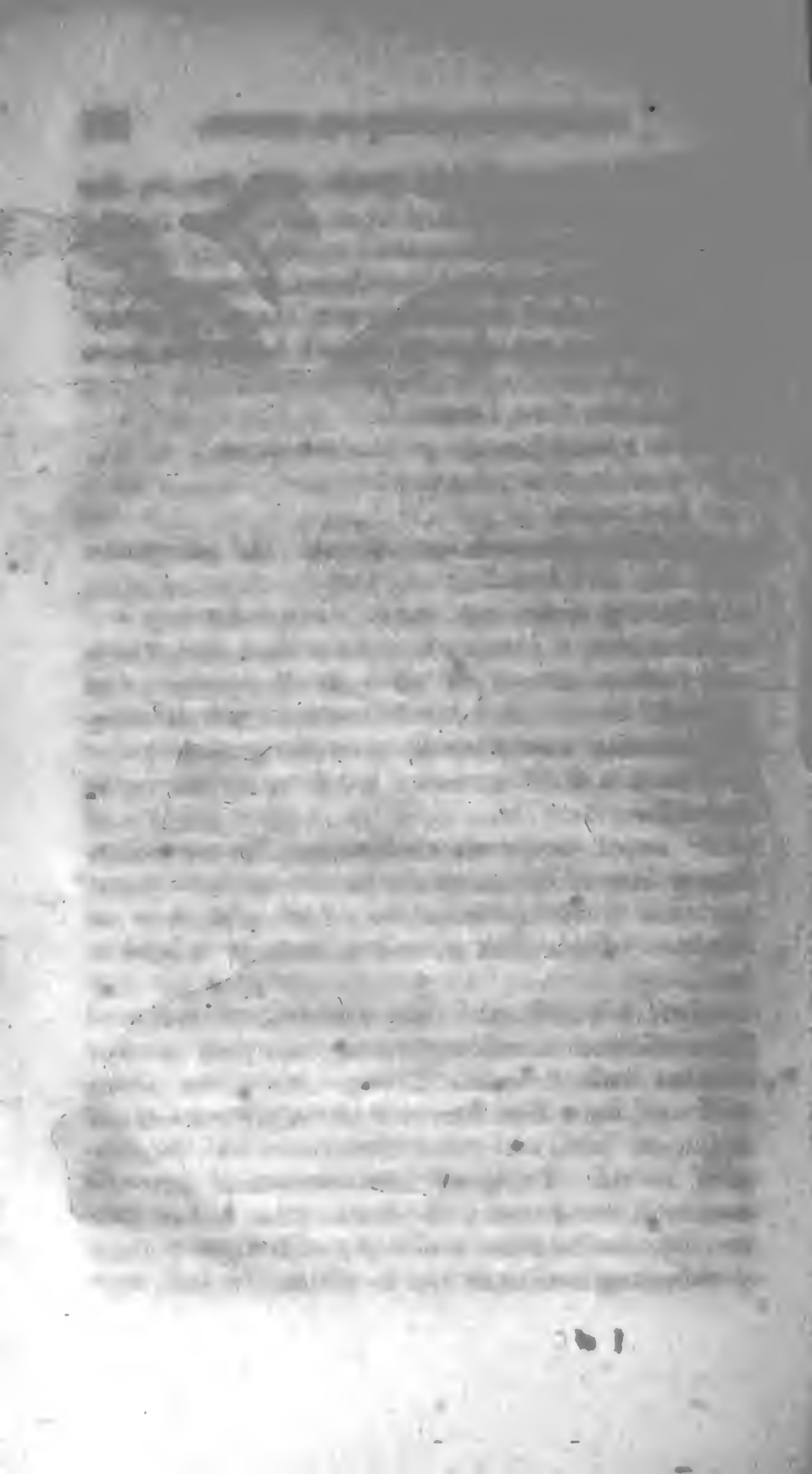
"Too bad!" I murmured fretfully, "that girl has never touched the fire."

So I gave the bell a pretty vigorous jerk. In a few minutes up came Nancy, the cook, in answer to my summons.

RATHER SLIPPERY

(66)

L. of C.



"Why hasn't Biddy made the fire in the heater?" I asked.

"She has made it, mum."

"There isn't a particle of heat coming up."

"I heard her at work down there. I guess she's made it up, but it hasn't began to burn good yet."

"Tell her that I want her."

"She's washing the pavement, mum."

"Washing the pavement!"

"Yes, mum."

"What possessed her to wash the pavement on a day like this?"

"It's the right day, mum. It's Saturday."

"Saturday! Don't she know that the water will freeze almost as soon as it touches the ground? Go and tell her to come in this minute, and not throw another drop on the pavement."

Nancy withdrew, and I kept on speaking to myself—

"I never saw such creatures. No consideration in them! Washing the pavement on a morning like this! Little do they care who falls on the ice; or who has a broken arm, or a broken leg."

Just as I had said this, I heard a crash, and an exclamation without, and hurrying to the window looked forth. Biddy's work was done, and well done, for the pavement was one sheet of ice, as hard and smooth as glass, and as slippery as oil. Prostrate thereon was a grocer's boy, and just beyond the curb stone, in the gutter, lay the fragments of a jug of molasses.

Stepping back quickly to where the bell rope

hung against the wall, I gave it a most determined jerk. Scarcely had I done this, ere the door of the adjoining room, which was used as a nursery, opened, and Biddy appeared therein.

"Why, Biddy!" I exclaimed, "what possessed you to throw water on the pavement this morning?"

"Faix! And how was I to get it clane, mim, widout wather?" coolly returned Biddy.

"Clean!"

"Yes, mim, clane."

"There was no crying necessity to have it clean to-day. Didn't you see—

"It's Sathurday, mim," interrupted Biddy, in a voice that showed the argument in her mind to be unanswerable. We always wash the pavement on Sathurday."

"But it doesn't do to wash the pavement, I returned, now trying to put a little reason into her head, "when it is so cold that water will freeze as soon as it touches the ground. The bricks become as slippery as glass, and people can't walk on them without falling."

"Och! And what hev we till do wid the paple. Lot 'em look 'till their steps."

"But, Biddy, that won't do. People don't expect to find pavements like glass; and they slip, often, while unaware of danger. Just at this moment a poor lad fell, and broke his jug all to pieces."

"Did he! And less the pity for him. Why did'nt he walk along like an orderly, dacent body? Why didn't he look 'till his steps?"

"Biddy," said I, seeing that it was useless to

hold an argument with her,—"Do you go this minute and throw ashes all over the pavement."

"Ashes on the clane pavement! Mrs. Smith!"

"Yes, Biddy; and do it at once. There! Somebody else has fallen."

I sprung to the window in time to see a woman on the pavement, and the contents of her basket of marketing scattered all around her.

"Go this minute and throw ashes over the pavement!" I called to Biddy in a voice of command.

The girl left the room with evident reluctance. The idea of scattering ashes over her clean pavement, was, to her, no very pleasant one.

It seemed to me, as I sat looking down from my windows upon the slippery flags, and noted the difficulty which pedestrians had to cross them safely, that Biddy would never appear with her pan of ashes.

"Why don't the girl do as I directed?" had just passed, in an impatient tone, from my lips, when two well dressed men came in view, one at each exteremity of the sheet of ice. They were approaching, and stepped with evident unconsciousness of danger, upon the treacherous surface. I had a kind of presentiment that one or both would fall, and my instinct was not at fault. Suddenly the heels of one flew up, and he struck the pavement with a concussion that sprung his hat from his head, and sent it some feet in the air. In his efforts to recover himself, his legs became entangled in those of the other, and over he went, backwards, his head striking the ground with a terrible shock.

I started from the window, feeling, for an instant, faint and sick. In a few moments I returned, and looked out again. Both the fallen ones had regained their feet, and passed out of sight, and Biddy, who had witnessed the last scene in this half comic, half tragic performance, was giving the pavement a plentiful coating of ashes and cinders.

I may be permitted to remark, that I trust other housekeepers, whose pavements are washed on cold mornings—and their name, I had almost said, is legion—are as innocent as I was in the above case, and that the wrong to pedestrians lies at the door of thoughtless servants. But is it not our duty to see the wrong has no further repetition?

It has been remarked that the residence of a truly humane man may be known by the ashes before his door on a slippery morning. If this be so, what are we to think of those who coolly supply a sheet of ice to the side walk?

CHAPTER XII.

REGARD FOR THE POOR.

We sometimes get, by chance, as it were, glimpses of life altogether new, yet full of instruction. I once had such a glimpse, and, at the time, put it upon record as a lesson for myself as well as others. Its introduction into this series of "Confessions" will be quite in place.

"How many children have you?" I asked of a poor woman, one day, who, with her tray of fish on her head, stopped at my door with the hope of finding a customer.

"Four," she replied.

"All young?"

"Yes ma'am. The oldest is but seven years of age."

"Have you a husband?" I enquired.

The woman replied in a changed voice:

"Yes, ma'am. But he isn't much help to me. Like a great many other men, he drinks too much. If it wasn't for that, you wouldn't find me crying fish about the streets in the spring, and berries through the summer, to get bread for my children. He could support us all comfortably, if he was only sober; for he has a good trade, and is a good workman. He used to earn ten and sometimes twelve dollars a week."

"How much do you make towards supporting your family?" I asked.

"Nearly all they get to live on, and that isn't much," she said bitterly. "My husband sometimes pays the rent, and sometimes he doesn't even do that. I have made as high as four dollars in a week, but oftener two or three is the most I get."

"How in the world can you support yourself, husband, and four children on three dollars a week?"

"I have to do it," was her simple reply. "There are women who would be glad to get three dollars a week, and think themselves well off."

"But how do you live on so small a sum?"

"We have to deny ourselves almost every little comfort, and confine ourselves down to the mere necessaries of life. After those who can afford to pay good prices for their marketing have been supplied, we come in for a part of what remains. I often get meat enough for a few cents to last me for several days. And its the same way with vegetables. After the markets are over, the butchers and country people, whom we know, let us have lots of things for almost nothing, sooner than take them home. In this way we make our slender means go a great deal farther than they would if we had to pay the highest market price for every thing. But, it often happens that what we gain here is lost in the eagerness we feel to sell whatever we have, especially when, from having walked and cried for a long time, we become much fatigued. Almost every

one complains that we ask too much for our things, if we happen to be one or two cents above what somebody has paid in market, where there are almost as many different prices as there are persons who sell. And in consequence, almost every one tries to beat us down.

"It often happens that, after I have walked for hours and sold but very little, I have parted with my whole stock at cost to some two or three ladies, who would not have bought from me at all if they hadn't known that they were making good bargains out of me; and this because I could not bear up any longer. I think it very hard, sometimes, when ladies, who have every thing in plenty, take off nearly all my profits, after I have toiled through the hot sun for hours, or shivered in the cold of winter. It is no doubt right enough for every one to be prudent, and buy things as low as possible; but it has never seemed to me as quite just for a rich lady to beat down a poor fish-woman, or strawberry-woman, a cent or two on a bunch or basket, when that very cent made, perhaps, one-third, or one-half of her profits.

"It was only yesterday that I stopped at a house to sell a bunch of fish. The lady took a fancy to a nice bunch of small rock, for which I asked her twenty cents. They had cost me just sixteen cents. 'Won't you take three fips?' she asked. 'That leaves me too small a profit, madam,' I replied. 'You want too much profit,' she returned; 'I saw just such a bunch of fish in market yesterday for three fips.' 'Yes, but remember,' I replied, 'that here are the fish at

your door. You neither have to send for them nor to bring them home yourself.' 'Oh, as to that,' she answered, 'I have a waiter whose business it is to carry the marketing. It is all the same to me. So, if you expect to sell me your things, you must do it at the market prices. I will give you three fips for that bunch of fish, and no more.' I had walked a great deal, and sold but little. I was tired, and half sick with a dreadful headache. It was time for me to think about getting home. So I said, 'Well, ma'am, I suppose you must take them, but it leaves me only a mere trifle for my profit.' A servant standing by took the fish, and the lady handed me a quarter, and held out her hand for the change. I first put into it a five cent piece. She continued holding it out, until I searched about in my pocket for a penny. This I next placed in her hand. 'So you've cheated me out of a cent at last,' she said, half laughing and half in earnest; 'you are a sad rogue.' A little boy was standing by. 'Here, Charley,' she said to him, 'is a penny I have just saved. You can buy a candy with it.'

As I turned away from the door of the large, beautiful house in which that lady lived, I felt something rising in my throat and choking me; I had bitter thoughts of all my kind.

"Happily, where I next stopped, I met with one more considerate. She bought two bunches of my fish at my own price—spoke very kindly to me, and even went so far, seeing that I looked jaded out, to tell me to go down into her kitchen and rest myself for a little while.

Leaving my tub of fish in her yard, I accepted the kind offer. It so happened that the cook was making tea for some one in the house who was sick. The lady asked me if I would not like to have a cup. I said yes; for my head was aching badly, and I felt faint; and besides, I had not tasted a cup of tea for several days. She poured it out with her own hands, and with her own hands brought it to me. I think I never tasted such a cup of tea in my life. It was like cordial. God bless her!—When I again went out upon the street my headache was gone, and I felt as fresh as ever I did in my life. Before I stopped at this kind lady's house, I was so worn down and out of heart, that I determined to go home, even though not more than half my fish were sold. But now I went on cheerful and with confidence. In an hour my tray was empty, and my fish sold at fair prices.

"You do not know, madam," continued the woman, "how much good a few kindly spoken words, that cost nothing, or a little generous regard for us, does our often discouraged hearts. But these we too rarely meet. Much oftener we are talked to harshly about our exorbitant prices —called a cheating set—or some such name that does not sound very pleasant to our ears. That there are many among us who have no honesty, nor, indeed, any care about what is right, is too true. But all are not so. To judge us all, then, by the worst of our class, is not right. It would not be well for the world if all were thus judged."

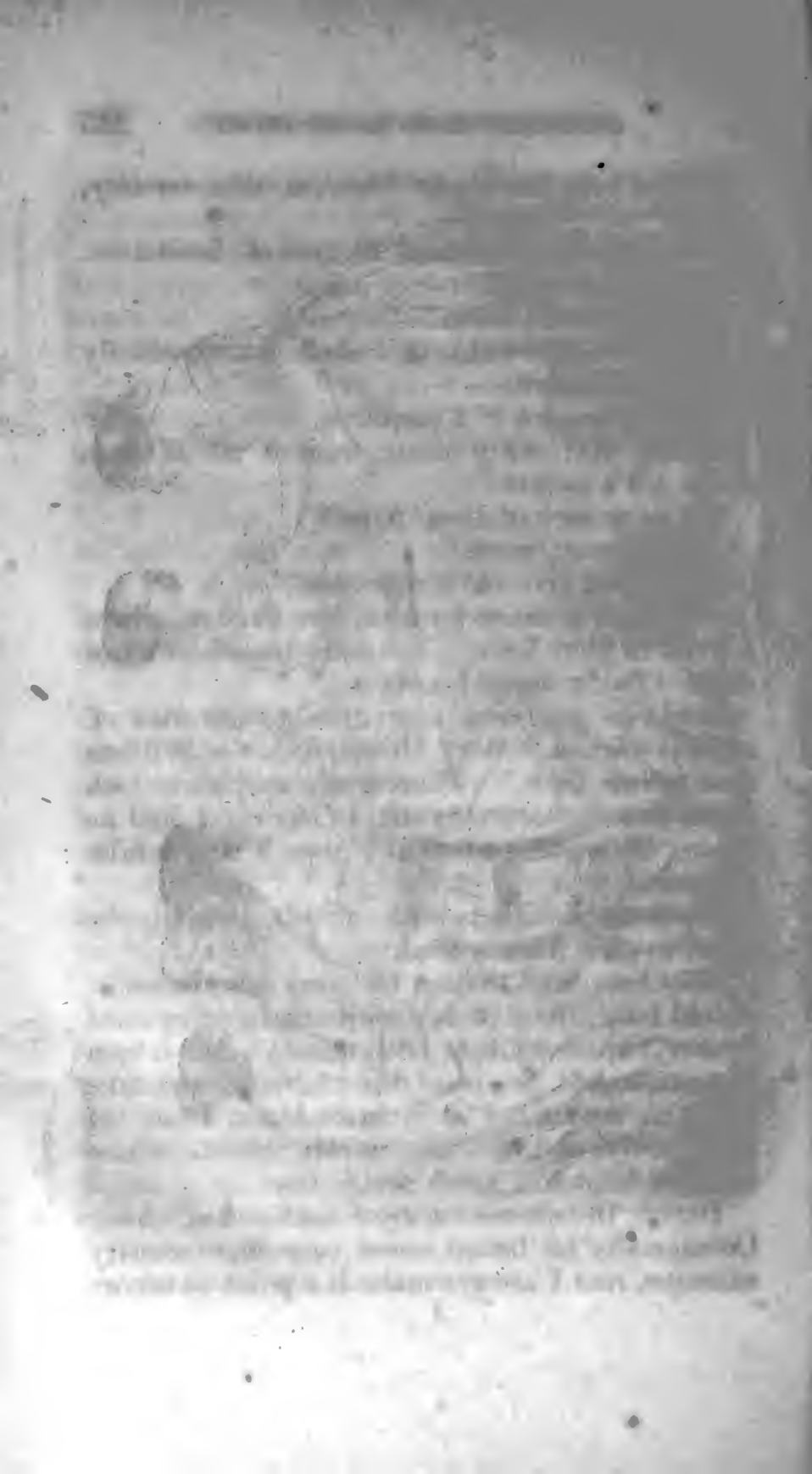
CHAPTER XIII.

SOMETHING MORE ABOUT COOKS.

For sometime I had a treasure of a cook; a fine Bucks county girl, whose strongest recommendation in my eyes, when I engaged her, was that she had never been out of sight of land. But she left my house for a "better place," as she said. I might have bribed her to remain, by an offer of higher wages; but, experience had demonstrated to my satisfaction, that this kind of bribery never turns out well. Your servant, in most instances, soon becomes your mistress—or, at least, makes bold efforts to assume that position.

So, I let my Bucks county girl go to her "better place." As to how or why it was to be a better place, I did not make enquiry. That was her business. She was a free agent, and I did not attempt to influence her. In fact, being of rather an independent turn of mind myself, I sympathize with others in their independence, and rarely seek to interfere with a declared course of action.

My new cook, unfortunately, had been out of sight of land, and that for weeks together. She was fresh from the Emerald Island. When she presented herself I saw in her but small promise. Having learned on enquiry that her name was Alice Mahoney, I said:



"How long have you been in this country, Alice?"

There was a moment or two of hesitation. Then she answered:

"Sax months, mum."

I learned afterwards that she had arrived only three days before.

"Can you cook?" I enquired.

"Och, yis! Ony thing, from a rib of bafe down till a parate."

"You're sure of that, Alice?"

"Och! sure, mum."

"Can you give me a reference?"

"I've got a char*ac*ter from Mrs. Jordan, where I lived in New York. I've only been here a few days. Biddy Jones knows me."

And she produced a written testification of ability, signed "Mary Jones, No. — William street, New York." There was a suspicious look about this "char*ac*ter;" but of course I had no means of deciding whether it were a true or false document.

After some debate with myself, I finally decided to give Alice a trial.

It so happened that on the very day she came, an old lady friend of my mother's, accompanied by her two daughters, both married and housekeepers, called to spend the afternoon and take tea. As they lived at some distance, I had tea quite early, not waiting for Mr. Smith, whose business kept him away pretty late.

During the afternoon, my "butter man" came. Occasionally he brings some very nice country sausages, and I always make it a point to secure

a few pounds when he does so. He had some on this occasion.

"Alice," said I, as I entered the kitchen about four o'clock, "I want you to hurry and get tea ready as quickly as you can."

"Yes, mum," was the ready reply.

"And Alice," I added, "we'll have some of these sausages with the tea. They are very fine ones—better than we usually get. Be sure to cook them very nice."

"Yes, mum," promptly answered the girl, looking quite intelligent.

A few more directions as to what we were to have were given, and then I went up to sit with my company.

It was not my intention to leave all to the doubtful skill of my new cook, but, either the time passed very rapidly, or she was more prompt and active than is usual among cooks, for the tea bell rung before I was in expectation of hearing it.

"Ah," said I, "there is our tea bell," and I arose, adding, "will you walk into the dining-room, ladies?"

The words were no sooner uttered than a doubt as to all being as I could wish crossed my mind; and I regretted that I had not first repaired to the dining-room alone. But, as it was too late now, or, rather, I did not happen to have sufficient presence of mind to recall my invitation to the ladies to walk in to tea, until I had preceded them a few minutes.

Well, we were presently seated at the tea table. My practised eye instantly saw that the cloth

was laid crookedly, and that the dishes were placed in a slovenly manner.

I couldn't help a passing apology, on the ground of a new domestic, and then proceeded to the business of pouring out the tea. The cups were handed around, and I soon noticed that my guests were sipping from their spoons in a very unsatisfactory manner. I was in the act of filling my own cup from the tea urn, when I missed the plate of sausages, about which I had boasted to my lady friends as something a little better than were usually to be obtained. So I rung the table bell. Alice presently made her appearance.

"Alice," said I, "where are the sausages I told you to cook? You surely hav'nt forgotten them?"

"Och, no indade, mum. They're there."

"Where? I don't see them."

And my eyes ran around the table.

"They're wid the ta mum, sure!"

"With the tea?"

"Sure, mum, they're wid the ta. Ye towld me yees wanted the sausages wid the ta; and sure they're there. I biled 'em well."

A light now flashed over my mind. Throwing up the lid of the tea urn, I thrust in a fork, which immediately came in contact with a hard substance. I drew it forth, and exhibited a single link of a well "biled" sausage.

"Let me draw a veil over what followed.

CHAPTER XIV.

NOT A RAG ON THEIR BACKS.

THERE are, among the many things which Mr. Smith, like other men, will *not* understand, frequent difficulties about the children's clothing. He seems to think that frocks and trowsers grow spontaneously; or that the dry goods, once bought and brought into the house, will resolve into the shapes desired, and fit themselves to the children's backs, like Cindarella's suit in the nursery tale. Now, I never did claim to be a sprite; and I am not sure that the experience of all housekeepers will bear me out in the opinion that the longer a woman is married, the less she becomes like a fairy.

Stitch! stitch! stitch! Hood's Song of the Shirt, which every body has heard and admired, is certainly most eloquent and pathetic upon the sufferings and difficulties of sewing girls. "Much yet remains unsung," particularly in regard to the ceaseless labors of women who are as rich as Cornelia in muslin-rending, habit-cloth-destroying, children's-plaid-rubbing—jewels! I am sure that the Roman matron never went shopping. I am sure that she did not undertake to keep her own children's clothing in repair; for if she had, she could not have been ready, at a moment's warning, to put forward her troublesome charge

as specimen jewels. Do all I can, my little comforts never *are* "fit to be seen!"

Many is the weary evening that I have been occupied, past the noon of night, in repairing the wear and tear of habiliments—abridging the volume of the elder children's clothes into narrow dimensions for the next, or compiling a suit for one, out of the fringed raiment of two or three. Honest was the pride with which I have surveyed these industrious efforts, and sincere the thought that I had really accomplished something. Depositing the various articles where the wearers elect would find them, I have retired to rest; almost angry with Mr. Smith, who was asleep hours before me—asleep as unconcernedly as if an indestructible substance fabric had been invented for children's clothing.

Well, after such a night's work, imagine me waking, with a complacent and happy sensation that, my work having been *done* on the day before, the morning is open for new employment. Down stairs I come, full of the thoughts of the confusion I shall heap on Mr. Smith's head. He, observe, told me, as he left me to retire, that I had much better go to bed, for all my work would amount to nothing but loss of necessary rest. I am ready to show him triumphant evidence to the contrary, in the clothes, as good as new, in which his children are habited. Before I can speak, I discern a lurking smile in his face. My boy Will stands in a sheepish posture, with his back as close to the jam, as if he were a polypus growing there, and his life depended upon the adhesion.

My eldest girl—another of the laboriously fitted out of the night before, has a marvellous affection for the little stool, and the skirt of her frock seems drawn about her feet in a most unbecoming manner.

But the third, an inveterate little romp, unconscious of shame, is curveting about in the most abandoned manner, utterly indifferent to the fact she has—not, indeed, "a rag to her back"—for she is *all* rags! One hour's play before my descent has utterly abolished all traces of my industry, so far as she is concerned.

I expostulate—at first more in sorrow than in anger—but as Mr. Smith's face expands into a broad laugh, it becomes more anger than sorrow. The child on the stool looks as if she would laugh, if she *dared*. Lifting her up suddenly, I discover that the whole front breadth of her frock is burned—past redemption.

I say nothing—what *can* I say? I have not words equal to the emergency. And the boy—boys *are* such copies of their fathers! He actually forgets all embarrassment, and breaks out into a hearty laugh. I jerk him forward.

Horror on horrors! The unveiling of the Bavarian statue, of which I read an account in the newspapers the other day, is nothing to it. The jamb, it appears, has supported something besides the mantle shelf; for when I draw the young Smith forward, deprived of the friendly aid of the wall, his teguments drop to the floor, and *he* stands unveiled! One fell swoop at rude play has destroyed all my little innumerable

stitches; and I am just where I was before I threaded a needle the night before!

Now I appeal to any body—any woman with the least experience, if this is not all *too bad!* And yet my husband insists that I have no need to be continually worrying myself with the needle. It *is* true that each of the children has four or five changes of clothes, which they might wear—but what is the use of their having things to "put right on—and tear right out!" I like to be prudent and saving. It was only the other day that Mr. Smith came in early, and found me busy; and commenced a regular oration. He said that every child in the house has a better wardrobe than he; and so he went on, and counted all off to me. He says—and men think they know *so much*—that if children have clothes they should wear them; and when they are worn out, provide more, and not try to keep as many half-worn suits in repair, as there are new suits in a queen's wardrobe. But he likes, as well as any man, to see his children look neat, whatever he may say. And yet he pretends that children should have clothes so made that they can convert themselves into horses, and treat each other to rides without rending to pieces! And he protests that it is all nonsense to undertake to keep children dressed in the fashion! Truly I am tempted to say to the men as Job did to his friends: "No doubt but ye are the people, and wisdom shall die with you!"

Such plagues as they are sometimes! But I could not help laughing after all, when, as I said before, he was lecturing me. The table was

covered with work, done and in progress. He went on till out of breath. I answered:

"Now you know the children have not a rag to their backs!"

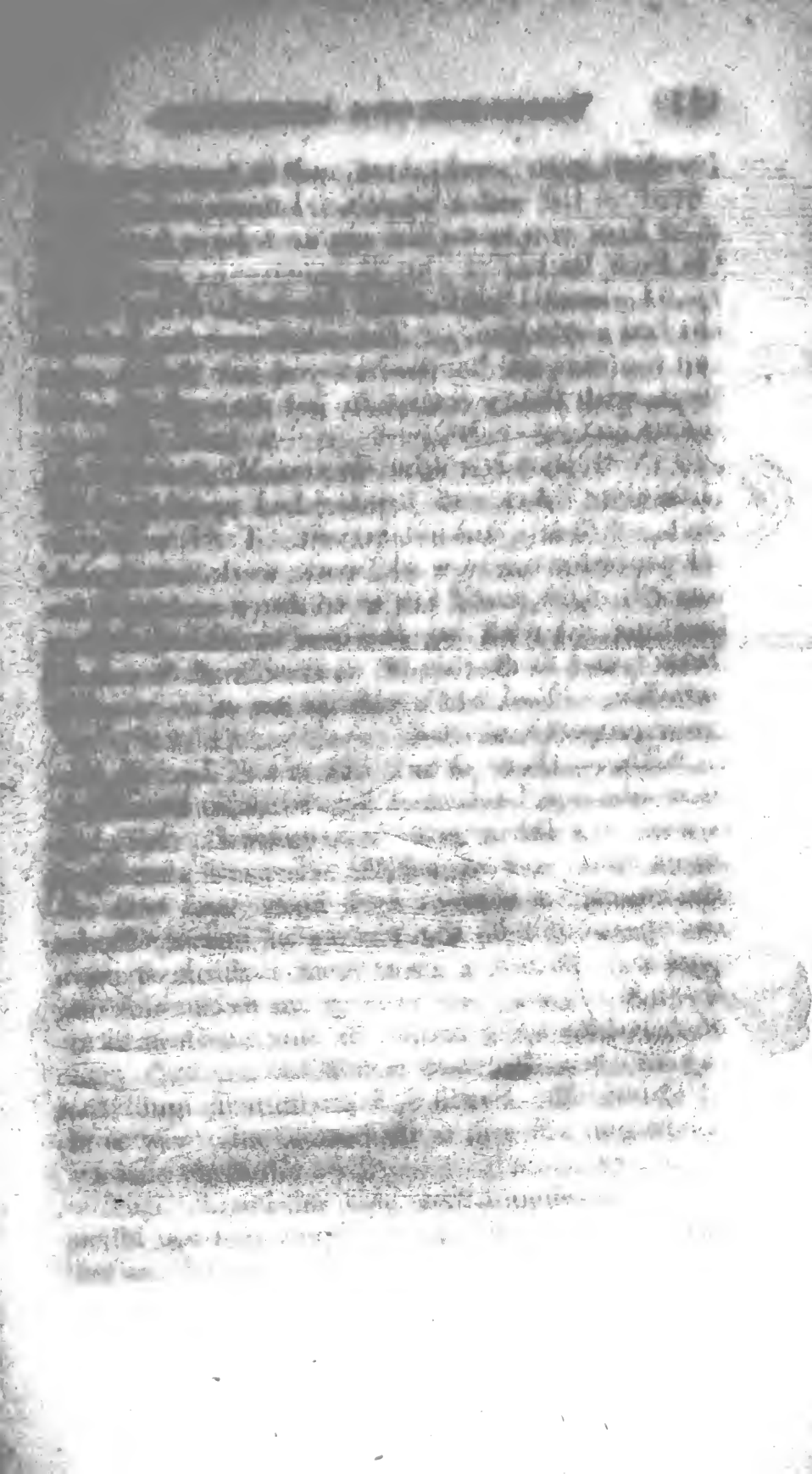
"I should think not," he said, drily, as he looked about him. "The other morning finished up the rags on hand—but you are doing your best, with flimsy finery, to get up a new assortment."

"Now, that is unkind in you, Mr. Smith," said I, feeling hurt, and looking and speaking as I felt. "Really unkind in you. I'm sure it's no pleasure for me to work, work, work, from morning till night, until I'm worn down and good for nothing. I wish my children to look decent at least; and to do this at as small cost to you as possible. You can't charge me with wasting your property, at least."

"There, there, dear! That will do. Say no more about it," returned Mr. Smith, in a soothing voice. "I didn't mean to be unkind. Still, I do think that you are a little over-particular about the children's clothes, as I have said before—over-particular in the matter of having things *just so*. Better, a great deal, I think, spare a few hours from *extra work* given to the clothing designed for their bodies, to that which is to array and beautify their minds."

"Now, Mr. Smith!" I exclaimed, and then bending my face into my hands, gave way to involuntary tears.

That he should have said this!



"I WONDER WHO IT IS FROM. MRS. SMITH GETS A GREAT MANY LETTERS." (122)

CHAPTER XV.

CURIOSITY.

The curiosity of our sex is proverbial. Proverbs are generally based upon experience, and this one, I am ready to admit, is not without a good foundation to rest upon.

Our sex are curious; at least I am, and we are very apt to judge others by ourselves. I believe that I have never broken the seal nor peeped into a letter bearing the name of some other lady; but, then, I will own to having, on more occasions than one, felt an exceedingly strong desire to know the contents of certain epistles in the hands of certain of my friends.

The same feeling I have over and over again observed in my domestics, and, for this reason, have always been careful how I let my letters lie temptingly about. One chamber maid in my service, seemed to have a passion for reading other people's letters. More than once had I caught her rumaging in my drawers, or with some of my old letters in her hands; and I could not help remarking that most of the letters left at the door by the penny post, had, if they passed to me through her, a crumpled appearance. I suspected the cause of this, but did not detect my lady, until she had been some months in my family.

One morning, after breakfast was over, and the children off to school, I drew on a cap, and went down to sweep out and dust the parlors. I had not been at work long, when I heard the bell ring. Presently Mary came tripping down stairs. As she opened the street door, I heard her say:

"Ah! another letter? Who is it for? Me?"

"No, it is for Mrs. Smith," was answered, in the rougher voice of the Despatch Post-man.

"Oh." There was a perceptible disappointment in Mary's tone. "What's the postage?" she asked.

"Paid," said the man.

The door closed, and I heard the feet of Mary slowly moving along the passage. Then the murmur of her voice reached my ears. Presently I heard her say:

"I wonder who it is from? Mrs. Smith gets a great many letters. No envelope, thank goodness! but a plain, good old fashioned letter. I must see who it is from."

By this time Mary had stepped within the back parlor. I stood, hid from her view, by one of the folding doors, which was closed, but within a few feet of her.

"From Mrs. Jackson! Hum—m. I wonder what she's got to say? Something about me, I'll bet a dollar."

There was a very apparent change in the thermometer of Mary's feelings at this last thought, as was evident from the tone of her voice.

"Lace collars—stockings—pocket han—. I

can't make out that word, but it is handkerchiefs, of course," thus Mary read and talked to herself. "Breastpin—this is too mean! It's not true, neither. I'm a great mind to burn the letter. Mrs. Smith would never be the wiser. I won't give it to her now, at any rate. I'll put it in my pocket, and just think about it."

The next sound that came to my ears was the pattering of Mary's feet as she went hurrying up the stairs.

In a few minutes I followed. In one of my chambers I found Mary, and said to her:

"Didn't the carrier leave me a letter just now?"

The girl hesitated a moment, and then answered:

"Oh, yes, ma'am. I have it here in my pocket."

And she drew forth the letter, crumbled, as was usually the case with all that passed through her hands.

I took it, with some gravity of manner; for I felt, naturally enough, indignant. Mary flushed a little under the steady eye that I fixed upon her.

The letter, or note, was from my friend, Mrs. Jackman, and read as follows:

"My Dear Mrs. Smith.—Do call in and see me some time to-day. I have bought some of the cheapest laces, stockings, and cambric pocket handkerchiefs that ever were seen. There are more left; and at a great bargain. You must have some. And, by the way, bring with you that sweet breastpin I saw you wear at Mrs.

May's last Thursday evening. I want to examine it closely. I must have one just like it. Do come round to-day; I've lots of things to say to you. Yours, &c."

"Nothing so dreadful in all that," I said to myself, as I re-folded the letter. "My curious lady's conscience must be a little active! Let's see what is to come of this."

It is hardly in the nature of woman to look very lovingly upon the servant whom she has discovered peeping into her letters. At least, it was not in my nature. I, therefore, treated Mary with becoming gravity, whenever we happened to meet. She, under the circumstances, was ill at ease; and rather shunned contact with me. The morning passed away, and the afternoon waned until towards five o'clock, when the accumulating pressure on Mary's feelings became so great that she was compelled to seek relief.

I was alone, sewing, when my chamber maid entered my room. The corners of her lips inclined considerably downward.

"Can I speak a word with you, Mrs. Smith?" said she.

"Certainly, Mary," I replied. "What do you wish to say?"

Mary cleared her throat once or twice—looked very much embarrassed, and at length stammered out:

"You received a letter from Mrs. Jackson this morning?"

"No." I shook my head as I uttered this little monosyllable.

A flush of surprise went over the girl's face.

"Wasn't the letter I gave you from Mrs. Jackson?" she asked.

"No; it was from Mrs. Jackman."

Mary caught her breath, and stammered out, in her confusion:

"Oh, my! I thought it was from Mrs. Jackson. I was sure of it."

"What right had you to think any thing about it?" I asked, with marked severity.

Mary's face was, by this time crimsoned.

I looked at her for some moments, and then, taking from my drawer Mrs. Jackman's note, handed it to her, and said:

"There's the letter you were so curious about this morning. Read it."

Mary's eyes soon took in the contents. The moment she was satisfied, she uttered a short "Oh!" strongly expressive of mental relief, and handed me back the letter.

"I thought it was from Mrs. Jackson," said the still embarrassed girl, looking confused and distressed.

"You can now retire," said I, "and when another letter is left at my door, be kind enough to consider it my property, not yours. I shall make it my business to see Mrs. Jackson, and ascertain from her why you are so much afraid that she will communicate with me. There's something wrong."

Poor Mary still lingered.

"Indeed, Mrs. Smith," she sobbed—"I didn't do nothing wrong at Mrs. Jackson's, but wear her clothes sometimes. Once I just borrowed a

breastpin of hers out of her drawer, to wear to a party; and she saw me with it on, and said I had stolen it. But, I'd put my hand in the fire before I'd steal, Mrs. Smith! Indeed, indeed I would. I was only going to wear it to the party; and I didn't think there was any great harm in that."

"Of course there was harm in using other people's things without their consent," I replied, severely. "And I don't wonder that Mrs. Jackson accused you of stealing. But what cause had you for thinking this letter was from Mrs. Jackson?"

"The two names are so near alike, and then Mrs. Jackson speaks about—."

Here Mary caught herself, and crimsoned still deeper.

"That is," said I, "you took the liberty of peeping into my letter before you gave it to me; and this is not your first offence of the kind."

Mary was too much confounded to speak, or make any effort to excuse herself; and so thought it best to retire.

I called to see Mrs. Jackson that day. She gave Mary a good character, as far as honesty was concerned; but stated plainly her faults, especially her bad habit of wearing her clothes and trinkets, for which offence, in a moment of indignation, she had dismissed her from her service.

I saw no reason to send Mary away. But I gave her a "good talking." I think she is pretty well cured of her propensity of reading other people's letters.

CHAPTER XVI.

HOUSE-CLEANING.

I LIKE a clean house. So does Mr. Smith, and so do all men, if they would acknowledge it. At any rate, when their dwellings seem a little dingy or dusty—a very thin coat of dinginess or dust over the whole, producing a decidedly bad effect—I say when their dwellings appear to them out of order—though ever so little—*we* are sure to find it out. The dull look of the house appears to be communicated to the countenance of the master thereof. I confess that I have often been half inclined to wax and cork my husband's visage, or at least to whisk over it with the duster, and see if that experiment would not restore its sunny look.

But though men like clean houses, they do not like house-cleaning. They have certain absurd notions which they would wish to carry out; such, for instance, as that constant-quiet, preventive care, or frequent topical applications, carefully applied, would gradually renovate the whole interior. But who wishes to be cleaning *all* the time? Who wishes to be always dusting? Indeed, at the best, we are constantly with broom, brush, or besom in hand; but the men *will not* perceive it, and we receive no credit for our tidiness. What is to be done, then? Evidently

there is nothing better than a "demonstration," as the politicians say—a demonstration that may be felt; a mass-meeting of brooms, buckets, brushes, paint-pots, white-wash pails, chairs overturned, tubs, coal-skuttles, dust-pans, char-women, and all other possible disagreeables, all at once summoned, and each as much as possible in others' way. In this there is some satisfaction. It looks like *business*. It seems as if you were doing something. It raises the value of the operation, and demonstrates its usefulness and necessity; for if there is little difference apparent between the house before cleaning and after, there is a world of odds beetween a house-*cleaning* and a house *cleaned*. There is a perfect delight in seeing what order *can* be brought out of chaos, even though you are obliged to make the chaos first, to produce the effect.

I had inflicted several of these impressive lessons upon Mr. Smith. He had become so much horrified at their confusion, that I do believe he had fully reconciled himself to dust and dirt, as the better alternative. They were, to be sure, at some little cost of comfort to myself, and reflectively produced discomfort for him; for he traced, with a correctness which I could easier frown a than deny, many a week's indisposition to my house-cleaning phrenzy. And when a man's wife is sick, if he is a man of feeling, he is unhappy. And if he is a man of selfishness, he is wretched, too; for what becomes of husband's little comforts, when wife is not able to procure or direct them? So Mr. Smith,—for the better reason, I believe—pure compassion—declared,

long ago, against wholesale house-cleaning. And he has so often interfered in my proceedings with his provoking prophecy, "Now, you know, my dear, it will make you sick," that I have striven many a time to hide pain under a forced smile, when it seemed as if "my head was like to rend."

Now, a woman *can* carry her point in the house by stubborn daring, but "the better part of valor is discretion," and I have learned quietly to take my way, and steal a march upon him;—open the flood-gate—set the chimneys smoking—up with the carpets—throw the beds out of the windows—pack the best china in the middle of the floor, distributing pokers and fire-shovels among it—unhang the pictures—set all the doors ajar—roll the children in dust—cover my head with a soiled night-cap—put on slip-shod shoes—and streak my ancles with dust and dirty water. Then, if he pops in opportunely, I can say, with Shakspeare—amended:

> I am in *slops*,
> Stept in so far, that, should I wade no more,
> Returning were as tedious as go o'er.

And, then, husband has no choice but to retreat to a chop-house, and leave me to finish.

But the chance for a grand saturnalia is best when Mr. Smith goes from home for a day or two. Then I can deny myself to visitors—take full license—set the hydrant running, and puzzle the water commissioners with an extra consumption of Schuylkill. My last exploit in this way was rather disastrous; and I am patiently waiting for its memory to pass away, before I venture

even to think of repeating it. Mr. Smith had business in New York—imperative business, he said,—but I do believe it might have waited, had not Jenny Lind's first appearance taken place just then. This by the way. He went, and I was rejoiced to improve the opportunity, for it occurred precisely as I was devising some method to get myself so fairly committed to soap and brushes, that objection or interdict would be too late.

Never did I pack his carpet-bag with more secret satisfaction than on that morning. He was entirely unsuspicious of my intention—though he might have divined it but for having a secret of his own, for Kitty's water-heating operations spoiled the breakfast. There was more than a taste of "overdone" to the steak, and the whole affair, even to me, was intolerable—me, who had the pleasures of house-cleaning in perspective to console me. The door was scarce shut behind him, when I entered into the business *con amore*. It was resolved to begin at the very attic and sweep, scrub, and wash down. Old boxes and trunks were dragged out of their places, and piles of forgotten dust swept out. The passengers in the street had a narrow chance for their beavers and fall bonnets, for every front window had an extra plashing. Mr. Smith had several times urged me to permit him to introduce some Yankee fashion which he highly recommends for having "professional window-cleaners," with their whiting and brushes, who could go through the house with half the trouble, and none of the litter. There's nothing like water.

The first day's work sufficed to put the house into thorough confusion, and I retired to bed—but not to rest, for my fatigue was too great to sleep in comfort. My neglected child rested as ill as myself, and when I rose the next morning, it was with the oppressive weight of a weary day before me. I had the consciousness that the work *must* be completed before my husband's return; and he had engaged to be with me at dinner. I felt it an imperative duty to welcome him with a cheerful house, and a pleasant repast after his journey; but as the time of his arrival drew near, I was more and more convinced of the impossibility. Like a drove of wild beasts forced into a corner by a hunting party, we forced our unmanageable matters to a crisis. The area for old brooms and brushes, tubs, litter, and slops, was at last narrowed down to the kitchen, and all that remained of our house-cleaning was to put that place into something like the semblance of an apartment devoted to culinary purposes. Dinner, as yet, was unthought of—but the house was clean!

Wearied rather than refreshed by my night of unrest, my arms sore, and my limbs heavy, I labored with double zeal to get up an excitement, which should carry me through the remainder of the day. My head began to feel sensations of giddiness—for I had hardly eaten since my husband left. Of the pleasures of house-cleaning, I had at length a surfeit; when a ring, which I knew among all others, surprised me. I looked at the clock. It was past four, and the kitchen still in confusion, and the hearth cold.

I sank in a chair—in a swoon from sheer exhaustion. When I awoke to consciousness, an overturned pale of water was being absorbed by my clothing, my nose was rejecting with violent aversion the pungency of a bottle of prime Durham mustard, to which Kitty had applied as the best substitute for salts which the kitchen afforded; and my husband, carpet-bag and cane in hand, was pushing his way toward me with more haste than good speed, as the obstacles witnessed, which he encountered and overturned.

I was confined to my room a week—which I could not conceal from Mr. Smith. But he does not even yet know the whole amount of the breakage, and, thank fortune, he is too much of a man to ask. I am only afraid that he will succeed in forcing me to admit, that what he calls his classical proposition is true; that to clean a house does not require the feat of a Hercules, to wit: turning a river through it.

This is my story of house-cleaning, and it is in no very high degree flattering to my housekeeping vanity. Perhaps the thing might be managed differently. But I don't know. Out of chaos, order comes. While on this subject, it will be all in place to introduce another house-cleaning story, which I find floating about in the newspapers. It presents the matter from another point of view, and was written, it will be seen, by a man:

Talk of a washing day! What is that to a whole week of washing-days? No, even this gives no true idea of that worst of domestic

afflictions a poor man can suffer—house-cleaning. The washing is confined to the kitchen or wash-house, and the effect visible in the dining-room is in cold or badly cooked meals; with a few other matters not necessary to mention here. But in the house-cleaning—oh, dear! Like the dove from the ark, a man finds no place where he can rest the sole of his foot. Twice a year, regularly, have I to pass through this trying ordeal, *willy-nilly*, as it is said, in some strange language. To rebel is useless. To grumble of no avail. Up come the carpets, topsyturvy goes the furniture, and *swash!* goes the water from garret to cellar. I don't know how other men act on these occasions, but I find discretion the better part of valor, and submission the wisest expedient.

Usually it happens that my good wife works herself half to death—loses the even balance of her mind—and, in consequence, makes herself and all around her unhappy. To indulge in an unamiable temper is by no means a common thing for Mrs. Sunderland, and this makes its occurrence on these occasions so much the harder to bear. Our last house-cleaning took place in the fall. I have been going to write a faithful history of what was said, done, and suffered on the occasion ever since, and now put my design into execution, even at the risk of having my head combed with a three-legged stool by my excellent wife, who, when she sees this in print, will be taken, in nautical phrase, all aback. But, when a history of our own shortcomings, mishaps, mistakes, and misadventures will do others

good, I am for giving the history and pocketing the odium, if there be such a thing as odium attached to revelations of human weakness and error.

"We must clean house this week," said my good wife one morning as we sat at the breakfast-table—"every thing is in a dreadful condition. I can't look at nor touch any thing without feeling my flesh creep."

I turned my eyes, involuntarily, around the room. I was not, before, aware of the filthy state in which we were living. But not having so good "an eye for dirt" as Mrs. Sunderland, I was not able, even after having my attention called to the fact, to see "the dreadful condition" of things. I said nothing, however, for I never like to interfere in my wife's department. I assume it as a fact that she knows her own business better than I do.

Our domestic establishment consisted at this time of a cook, chamber maid, and waiter. This was an ample force, my wife considered, for all purposes of house-cleaning, and had so announced to the individuals concerned some days before she mentioned the matter incidentally to me. We had experienced, in common with others, our own troubles with servants, but were now excellently well off in this respect. Things had gone on for months with scarcely a jar. This was a pleasant feature in affairs, and one upon which we often congratulated ourselves.

When I came home at dinner-time, on the day the anticipated house-cleaning had been mentioned to me, I found my wife with a long face.

"Are you not well?" I asked.

"I'm well enough," Mrs. Sunderland answered, "but I'm out of all patience with Ann and Hannah."

"What is the matter with them?" I asked, in surprise.

"They are both going at the end of this week."

"Indeed! How comes that? I thought they were very well satisfied."

"So they were, all along, until the time for house-cleaning approached. It is too bad!"

"That's it—is it?"

"Yes. And I feel out of all patience about it. It shows such a want of principle."

"Is John going too?" I asked.

"Dear knows! I expect so. He's been as sulky as he could be all the morning—in fact, ever since I told him that he must begin taking up the carpets to-morrow and shake them."

"Do you think Ann and Hannah will really go?" I asked.

"Of course they will. I have received formal notice to supply their places by the end of this week, which I must do, somehow or other."

The next day was Thursday, and, notwithstanding both cook and chamber maid had given notice that they were going on Saturday, my wife had the whole house knocked into *pi*, as the printers say, determined to get all she could out of them.

When I made my appearance at dinner-time, I found all in precious confusion, and my wife heated and worried excessively. Nothing was going on right. She had undertaken to get the

dinner, in order that Ann and Hannah might proceed uninterruptedly in the work of house-cleaning; but as Ann and Hannah had given notice to quit in order to escape this very house-cleaning, they were in no humor to put things ahead. In consequence, they had "poked about and done nothing," to use Mrs. Sunderland's own language; at which she was no little incensed.

When evening came, I found things worse. My wife had set her whole force to work upon our chamber, early in the day, in order to have it finished as quickly as possible, that it might be in a sleeping condition by night—dry and well aired. But, instead of this, Ann and Hannah had "dilly-dallied" the whole day over cleaning the paint, and now the floor was not even washed up. My poor wife was in a sad way about it; and I am sure that I felt uncomfortable enough. Afraid to sleep in a damp chamber, we put two sofas together in the parlor, and passed the night there.

The morning rose cloudily enough. I understood matters clearly. If Mrs. Sunderland had hired a couple of women for two or three days to do the cleaning, and got a man to shake the carpets, nothing would have been heard about the sulkiness of John, or the notice to quit of cook and chamber maid. Putting upon them the task of house-cleaning was considered an imposition, and they were not disposed to stand it.

"I shall not be home to dinner to-day," I said, as I rose from the breakfast table. "As you are all in so much confusion, and you have to do the

cooking, I prefer getting something to eat down town."

"Very well," said Mrs. Sunderland—"so much the better."

I left the house a few minutes afterwards, glad to get away. Every thing was confusion, and every face under a cloud.

"How are you getting along?" I asked, on coming home at night.

"Humph! Not getting along at all!" replied Mrs. Sunderland, in a fretful tone. "In two days, the girls might have thoroughly cleaned the house from top to bottom, and what do you think they have done? Nothing at all!"

"Nothing at all! They must have done something."

"Well, next to nothing, then. They havn't finished the front and back chambers. And what is worse, Ann has gone away sick, and Hannah is in bed with a real or pretended sick-headache."

"Oh, dear!" I ejaculated, involuntarily.

"Now, a'nt things in a pretty way?"

"I think they are," I replied, and then asked, "what are you going to do?"

"I have sent John for old Jane, who helped us to clean house last spring. But, as likely as not, she's at work somewhere."

Such was in fact the case, for John came in a moment after with that consoling report.

"Go and see Nancy, then," my wife said, sharply, to John, as if he were to blame for Jane's being at work.

John turned away slowly and went on his

errand, evidently in not the most amiable mood in the world. It was soon ascertained that Nancy couldn't come.

"Why can't she come?" enquired my wife.

"She says she's doing some sewing for herself, and can't go out this week," replied John.

"Go and tell her that she must come. That my house is upside down, and both the girls are sick."

But Nancy was in no mood to comply. John brought back another negative.

"Go and say to her, John, that I will not take no for an answer: that she must come. I will give her a dollar a day."

This liberal offer of a dollar a day was effective. Nancy came and went to work on the next morning. Of course, Ann did not come back; and as it was Hannah's last day, she felt privileged to have more headache than was consistent with cleaning paint or scrubbing floors. The work went on, therefore, very slowly.

Saturday night found us without cook or chamber maid, and with only two rooms in order in the whole house, viz. our chambers on the second story. By great persuasion, Nancy was induced to stay during Sunday and cook for us.

An advertisement in the newspaper on Monday morning, brought us a couple of raw Irish girls, who were taken as better than nobody at all. With these new recruits, Mrs. Sunderland set about getting "things to right." Nancy plodded on, so well pleased with her wages, that she continued to get the work of one day

lengthened out into two, and so managed to get a week's job.

For the whole of another precious week we were in confusion.

"How do your new girls get along?" I asked of my wife, upon whose face I had not seen a smile for ten days.

"Don't name them, Mr. Sunderland! They're not worth the powder it would take to shoot them. Lazy, ignorant, dirty, good-for-nothing creatures. I wouldn't give them house-room."

"I'm sorry to learn that. What will you do?" I said.

"Dear knows! I was so well suited in Ann and Hannah, and, to think that they should have served me so! I wouldn't have believed it of them. But they are all as destitute of feeling and principle as they can be. And John continues as sulky as a bear. He pretended to shake the carpets, but you might get a wheelbarrow-load of dirt out of them. I told him so, and the impudent fellow replied that he didn't know any thing about shaking carpets; and that it wasn't the waiter's place, any how."

"He did?"

"Yes, he did. I was on the eve of ordering him to leave the house."

"I'll save you that trouble," I said, a little warmly.

"Don't say any thing to him, if you please, Mr. Sunderland," returned my wife. "There couldn't be a better man about the house than he is, for all ordinary purposes. If we should lose him, we shall never get another half so good.

I wish I'd hired a man to shake the carpets at once; they would have been much better done, and I should have had John's cheerful assistance about the house, which would have been a great deal."

That evening I overheard, accidentally, a conversation between John and the new girls, which threw some light upon the whole matter.

"John," said one of them, "what made Mrs. Sunderland's cook and chamber maid go aff and lave her right in the middle of house-clainin'?"

"Because Mrs. Sunderland, instead of hiring a woman, as every lady does, tried to put it all off upon them."

"Indade! and was that it?"

"Yes, it was. They never thought of leaving until they found they were to be imposed upon; and, to save fifty cents or a dollar, she made me shake the carpets. I never did such a thing in my life before. I think I managed to leave about as much dirt in as I shook out. But I'll leave the house before I do it again."

"So would I, John. It was a downright mane imposition, so it was. Set a waiter to shaking carpets!"

"I don't think much has been saved," remarked the waiter, for Nancy has had a dollar a day ever since she has been here.'

"Indade!"

"Yes; and besides that, Mrs. Sunderland has had to work like a dog herself. All this might have been saved, if she had hired a couple of women at sixty-two and a half cents a day for two or three days, and paid for having the car-

pets shaken; that's the way other people do. The house would have been set to rights in three or four days, and every thing going on like clock-work."

I heard no more. I wanted to hear no more; it was all as clear as day to me. When I related to Mrs. Sunderland what John had said, she was, at first, quite indignant. But the reasonableness of the thing soon became so apparent that she could not but acknowledge that she had acted very unwisely.

"This is another specimen of your saving at the spigot," I said, playfully.

"There, Mr. Sunderland! not a word more, if you please, of that," she returned, her cheek more flushed than usual. "It is my duty, as your wife, to dispense with prudence in your household; and if, in seeking to do so, I have run a little into extremes, I think it ill becomes you to ridicule or censure me. Dear knows! I have not sought my own ease or comfort in the matter."

"My dear, good wife," I quickly said, in a soothing voice, "I have neither meant to ridicule nor censure you; nothing was farther from my thoughts."

"You shall certainly have no cause to complain of me on this score again," she said, still a little warmly. "When next we clean house, I will take care that it shall be done by extra help altogether."

"Do so by all means, Mrs. Sunderland. Let there be, if possible, two paint-cleaners and scrubbers in every room, that the work may all

be done in a day instead of a week. Take my word for it, the cost will be less; or, if double, I will cheerfully pay it for the sake of seeing 'order from chaos rise' more quickly than is wont under the ordinary system of doing things."

My wife did not just like this speech, I could see, but she bit her lips and kept silent.

In a week we were without a cook again; and months passed before we were in any thing like domestic comfort. At last my wife was fortunate enough to get Ann and Hannah back again, and then the old pleasant order of things was restored. I rather think that we shall have a different state of things at next house-cleaning time. I certainly hope so.

CHAPTER XVII.

BROILING A LOBSTER.

Mr. Smith's appetite sometimes takes an epicurean turn, and then we indulge in a lobster, calf's-head soup, terrapins, or something of that sort.

Once upon a time, he sent home a lobster. I did not feel very well that day, and concluded to leave the cooking of the animal to a new girl that I had taken a week or two before, on a strong recommendation. She claimed to be a finished cook, and her testimonials were distinct on that head.

"Kitty," said I, "Mr. Smith has sent home a lobster, I believe?"

I had summoned the girl to my room.

"Yes, ma'am," she replied. "Is it for dinner?"

"Of course it is; and you must see that it is well cooked."

Kitty lingered a few moments, as if not entirely satisfied about something, and then retired to the kitchen.

"I wonder if she knows how to boil a lobster?" said I to myself.

But then, the remembrance that she had come to me as a finished cook, crossed my mind, and I answered, mentally, my own question, by saying:

"Of course she does."

Not long afterwards, I went to the dining-room, which was over the kitchen. I had been there only a little while, when I heard an unusual noise below, followed by an exclamation from Kitty—

"Oh! murderation! *I* can't cook the straddling thing. I wonder what Mr. Smith brought it home alive for!"

I was, of course, all attention now, and going to the top of the stairs, stood listening to what was going on below.

"There now. Lie still!" I heard Kitty say. This was followed by a rattling of tongs, or some other iron implements, and a rapid shuffling of feet.

Curious to know what was going on, I stepped lightly down the stairs, and through the open door had a full view of both Kitty and the lobster.

Live coals had been raked out upon the hearth. Over these was placed a gridiron, and on this not very comfortable bed Kitty was endeavoring to force Mr. Lobster to lie still and be cooked. But this he was by no means inclined to do; and no sooner did she place him on the heated bars, than he made his way off in the quickest possible time. Then she caught hold of him with the tongs, restored him to his proper position on the gridiron, and with poker and tongs strove to hold him there.

As the lobster, a second and a third time, struggled free of Kitty's tongs and poker, I could no longer restrain myself, but burst forth into a

loud fit of laughter. By the time this subsided, his lobstership was in the middle of the kitchen floor. Picking him up, I threw him into a pot of boiling water, and then retreated from the kitchen, so convulsed with laughter that I could not utter a word.

Kitty did not soon hear the last of her attempt to broil a lobster.

CHAPTER XVIII.

THE STRAWBERRY-WOMAN.

The observance of economy in matters of family expenditure, is the duty of every housekeeper. But, there is an economy that involves wrong to others, which, as being unjust and really dishonest, should be carefully avoided. In a previous chapter, I introduced the story of a poor fish-woman, as affording a lesson for the humane. Let me here give another, which forcibly illustrates the subject of oppressive and unjust economy. It is the story of a "Strawberry-Woman," and appeared in one of the magazines some years ago.

"Strawb'*rees!* Strawb'*rees!*" cried a poorly clad, tired-looking woman, about eleven o'clock one sultry June morning. She was passing a handsome house in Walnut street, into the windows of which she looked earnestly, in the hope of seeing the face of a customer. She did not look in vain, for the shrill sound of her voice brought forward a lady, dressed in a silk morning-wrapper, who beckoned her to stop. The woman lifted the heavy tray from her head, and placing it upon the door-step, sat wearily down.

"What's the price of your strawberries?" asked the lady, as she came to the door.

"Ten cents a box, madam. They are right fresh."

"Ten cents!" replied the lady, in a tone of surprise, drawing herself up, and looking grave. Then shaking her head and compressing her lips firmly, she added:

"I can't give ten cents for strawberries. It's too much."

"You can't get such strawberries as these for less, madam," said the woman. I got a levy a box for them yesterday."

"Then you got too much, that's all I have to say. I never pay such prices. I bought strawberries in the market yesterday, just as good as yours, for eight cents a box."

"I don't know how they do to sell them at that price," returned the woman. "Mine cost nearly eight cents, and ought to bring me at least twelve. But I am willing to take ten, so that I can sell out quickly. It's a very hot day." And the woman wiped, with her apron, the perspiration from her glowing face.

"No, I won't pay ten cents," said the lady(?) coldly. "I'll give you forty cents for five boxes, and nothing more."

"But, madam, they cost me within a trifle of eight cents a box."

"I can't help that. You paid too much for them, and this must be your loss, not mine, if I buy your strawberries. I never pay for other people's mistakes. I understand the use of money much better than that."

The poor woman did not feel very well. The day was unusually hot and sultry, and her tray

felt heavier, and tired her more than usual. Five boxes would lighten it, and if she sold her berries at eight cents, she would clear two cents and a half, and that would be better than nothing.

"I'll tell you what I will do," she said, after thinking a few moments; "I don't feel as well as usual to-day, and my tray is heavy. Five boxes sold will be something. You shall have them at nine cents. They cost me seven and a half, and I'm sure it's worth a cent and a half a box to cry them about the streets such hot weather as this."

"I have told you, my good woman, exactly what I will do," said the customer, with dignity. "If you are willing to take what I offer you, say so; if not, we needn't stand here any longer."

"Well, I suppose you will have to take them," replied the strawberry-woman, seeing that there was no hope of doing better. "But it's too little."

"It's enough," said the lady, as she turned to call a servant. Five boxes of fine large strawberries were received, and forty cents paid for them. The lady re-entered the parlor, pleased at her good bargain, while the poor woman turned from the door sad and disheartened. She walked nearly the distance of a square before she could trust her voice to utter her monotonous cry of

"Strawb'*rees!* Strawb'*rees!*"

An hour afterward, a friend called upon Mrs. Mier, the lady who had bought the strawberries. After talking about various matters and things interesting to lady housekeepers, Mrs. Mier said:

"How much did you pay for strawberries this morning?"

"Ten cents."

"You paid too much. I bought them for eight."

"For eight! Were they good ones?"

"Step into the dining-room, and I will show them to you."

The ladies stepped into the dining-room, when Mrs. Mier diplayed her large, red berries, which were really much finer than she had at first supposed them to be.

"You didn't get them for eight cents," remarked the visitor, incredulously.

"Yes I did. I paid forty cents for five boxes."

"While I paid fifty for some not near so good."

"I suppose you paid just what you were asked?"

"Yes, I always do that. I buy from one woman during the season, who agrees to furnish me at the regular market price."

"Which you will always find to be two or three cents above what you can get them for in the market."

"You always buy in market."

"I bought these from a woman at the door."

"Did she only ask eight cents for them?"

"Oh, no! She asked ten cents, and pretended that she got twelve and a half for the same quality of berries yesterday. But I never give these people what they ask."

"While I never can find it in my heart to ask a poor, tired-looking woman at my door, to take a cent less for her fruit than she asks me. A

cent or two, while it is of little account to me, must be of great importance to her."

"You are a very poor economist, I see," said Mrs. Mier. "If that is the way you deal with every one, your husband no doubt finds his expense account a very serious item.

"I don't know about that. He never complains. He allows me a certain sum every week to keep the house, and find my own and the children's clothes; and so far from ever calling on him for more, I always have fifty or a hundred dollars lying by me."

"You must have a precious large allowance, then, considering your want of economy in paying everybody just what they ask for their things."

"Oh, no! I don't do that, exactly, Mrs. Mier. If I consider the price of a thing too high, I don't buy it."

"You paid too high for your strawberries today."

"Perhaps I did; although I am by no means certain."

"You can judge for yourself. Mine cost but eight cents, and you own that they are superior to yours at ten cents."

"Still, yours may have been too cheap, instead of mine too dear."

"Too cheap! That is funny! I never saw any thing too cheap in my life. The great trouble is, that every thing is too dear. What do you mean by too cheap?"

"The person who sold them to you may not have made profit enough upon them to pay for

her time and labor. If this were the case, she sold them to you too cheap."

"Suppose she paid too high for them? Is the purchaser to pay for her error?"

"Whether she did so, it would be hard to tell; and even if she had made such a mistake, I think it would be more just and humane to pay her a price that would give her a fair profit, instead of taking from her the means of buying bread for her children. At least, this is my way of reasoning."

"And a precious lot of money it must take to support such a system of reasoning. But how much, pray, do you have a week to keep the family? I am curious to know."

"Thirty-five dollars."

"Thirty-five dollars! You are jesting."

"Oh, no! That is exactly what I receive, and as I have said, I find the sum ample."

"While I receive fifty dollars a week," said Mrs. Mier, "and am forever calling on my husband to settle some bill or other for me. And yet I never pay the exorbitant prices asked by everybody for every thing. I am strictly economical in my family. While other people pay their domestics a dollar and a half and two dollars a week, I give but a dollar and a quarter each to my cook and chambermaid, and require the chamber maid to help the washer-woman on Mondays. Nothing is wasted in my kitchen, for I take care in marketing, not to allow room for waste. I don't know how it is that you save money on thirty-five dollars with your system, while I find fifty dollars inadequate with my system."

The exact difference in the two systems will be clearly understood by the reader, when he is informed that although Mrs. Mier never paid any body as much as was at first asked for an article, and was always talking about economy, and trying to practice it, by withholding from others what was justly their due, as in the case of the strawberry-woman, yet she was a very extravagant person, and spared no money in gratifying her own pride. Mrs. Gilman, her visitor, was, on the contrary, really economical, because she was moderate in all her desires, and was usually as well satisfied with an article of dress or furniture that cost ten or twenty dollars, as Mrs. Mier was with one that cost forty or fifty dollars. In little things, the former was not so particular as to infringe the rights of others, while in larger matters, she was careful not to run into extravagance in order to gratify her own or children's pride and vanity, while the latter pursued a course directly opposite.

Mrs. Gilman was not as much dissatisfied, on reflection, about the price she had paid for her strawberries, as she had felt at first.

"I would rather pay these poor creatures two cents a box too much than too little," she said to herself,—"dear knows, they earn their money hard enough, and get but a scanty portion after all."

Although the tray of the poor strawberry-woman, when she passed from the presence of Mrs. Mier, was lighter by five boxes, her heart was heavier, and that made her steps more weary than before. The next place at which she stop-

ped, she found the same disposition to beat her down in her price.

"I'll give you nine cents, and take four boxes," said the lady.

"Indeed, madam, that is too little," replied the woman; "ten cents is the lowest at which I can sell them and make even a reasonable profit."

"Well, say thirty-seven and a half for four boxes, and I will take them. It is only two cents and a half less than you ask for them."

"Give me a fip, ma!—there comes the candy-man!" exclaimed a little fellow, pressing up to the side of the lady. "Quick, ma! Here, candy-man!" calling after an old man with a tin cylinder under his arm, that looked something like an ice cream freezer. The lady drew out her purse, and searched among its contents for the small coin her child wanted.

"I havn't any thing less than a levy," she at length said.

"Oh, well, he can change it. Candy-man, you can change a levy?"

By this time the "candy-man" stood smiling beside the strawberry-woman. As he was counting out the fip's worth of candy, the child spoke up in an earnest voice, and said:

"Get a levy's worth, mother, do, wont you? Cousin Lu's coming to see us to-morrow."

"Let him have a levy's worth, candy-man. He's such a rogue I can't resist him," responded the mother. The candy was counted out, and the levy paid, when the man retired in his usual good humor.

"Shall I take these strawberries for thirty-

seven and a half cents?" said the lady, the smile fading from her face. "It is all I am willing to give."

"If you wont pay any more, I musn't stand for two cents and a half," replied the woman, "although they would nearly buy a loaf of bread for the children," she mentally added.

The four boxes were sold for the sum offered, and the woman lifted the tray upon her head, and moved on again. The sun shone out still hotter and hotter as the day advanced. Large beads of perspiration rolled from the throbbing temples of the strawberry-woman, as she passed wearily up one street and down another, crying her fruit at the top of her voice. At length all were sold but five boxes, and now it was past one o'clock. Long before this she ought to have been at home. Faint from over-exertion, she lifted her tray from her head, and placing it upon a door-step, sat down to rest. As she sat thus, a lady came up, and paused at the door of the house, as if about to enter.

"You look tired, my good woman," she said kindly. "This is a very hot day for such hard work as yours. How do you sell your strawberries?"

"I ought to have ten cents for them, but nobody seems willing to give ten cents to-day, although they are very fine, and cost me as much as some I have got twelve and a half for."

"How many boxes have you?"

"Five, ma'am."

"They are very fine, sure enough," said the

lady, stooping down and examining them; "and well worth ten cents. "I'll take them."

"Thanky, ma'am. I was afraid I should have to take them home," said the woman, her heart bounding up lightly.

The lady rung the bell, for it was at her door that the tired strawberry-woman had stopped to rest herself. While she was waiting for the door to be opened, the lady took from her purse the money for the strawberries, and handing it to the woman, said:

"Here is your money. Shall I tell the servant to bring you out a glass of cool water? You are hot and tired."

"If you please, ma'am," said the woman, with a grateful look.

The water was sent out by the servant who was to receive the strawberries, and the tired woman drank it eagerly. Its refreshing coolness flowed through every vein, and when she took up her tray to return home, both heart and step were lighter.

The lady whose benevolent feelings had prompted her to the performance of this little act of kindness, could not help remembering the woman's grateful look. She had not done much —not more than it was every one's duty to do; but the recollection of even that was pleasant, far more pleasant than could possibly have been Mrs. Mier's self-gratulations at having saved ten cents on her purchase of five boxes of strawberries, notwithstanding the assurance of the poor woman who vended them, that, at the reduced

rate, her profit on the whole would only be two cents and a half.

After dinner Mrs. Mier went out and spent thirty dollars in purchasing jewelry for her eldest daughter, a young lady not yet eighteen years of age. That evening, at the tea-table, the strawberries were highly commended as being the largest and most delicious in flavor of any they had yet had; in reply to which, Mrs. Mier stated, with an air of peculiar satisfaction, that she had got them for eight cents a box, when they were worth at least ten cents.

"The woman asked me ten cents," she said, "but I offered her eight, and she took them."

While the family of Mrs. Mier were enjoying their pleasant repast, the strawberry-woman sat at a small table, around which were gathered three young children, the oldest but six years of age. She had started out in the morning with thirty boxes of strawberries, for which she was to pay seven and a half cents a box. If all had brought the ten cents a box, she would have made seventy-five cents; but such was not the case. Rich ladies had beaten her down in her price—had chaffered with her for the few pennies of profits to which her hard labor entitled her—and actually robbed her of the meager pittance she strove to earn for her children. Instead of realizing the small sum of seventy-five cents, she had cleared only forty-five cents. With this she bought a little Indian meal and molasses for her own and her children's supper and breakfast.

As she sat with her children, eating the only

food she was able to provide for them, and thought of what had occurred during the day, a feeling of bitterness toward her kind came over her; but the remembrance of the kind words, and the glass of cool water, so timely and thoughtfully tendered to her, was like leaves in the waters of Marah. Her heart softened, and with the tears stealing to her eyes, she glanced upward, and asked a blessing on her who had remembered that, though poor, she was still human.

Economy is a good thing, and should be practiced by all, but it should show itself in denying ourselves, not in oppressing others. We see persons spending dollar after dollar foolishly one hour, and in the next trying to save a five penny piece off of a wood-sawyer, coal-heaver, or market-woman. Such things are disgraceful, if not dishonest.

CHAPTER XIX.

LOTS OF THINGS.

"O DEAR!" said I to Mr. Smith one morning, as we arose from the breakfast-table, at which we had been partaking of rather a badly-cooked meal,—"more trouble in prospect."

"What's the matter now?" asked Mr. Smith, with a certain emphasis on the word "now" that didn't sound just agreeable to my ears.

"Oh, nothing! nothing!" I answered, with as much indifference of manner as I could assume.

"You spoke of trouble," said he, kindly, "and trouble, in my experience, is rather more tangible than 'nothing.'"

"I've another raw Irish girl in the kitchen, who, according to her own confession, hasn't been above ten days in the country. Isn't that enough?"

"I should think so. But, why, in the name of goodness did you take another of these *green* islanders into your house?"

"It's easy enough to ask questions, Mr. Smith," said I, a little fretfully; "but—" I checked myself. We looked at each other, smiled, and—said no more on the subject.

"Your name is Anna, I believe?" said I, as I stepped to the kitchen-door, a couple of hours afterwards.

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"Thot's me name," replied the new domestic.

"I will send home a loin of veal and some green peas," said I. "They are for dinner, which must be ready at two o'clock. You know how to roast a piece of veal, I presume?"

"Lave me for thot same, honey!"

"And the green peas?"

"All right, mum. I've lived in quality houses since I was so high. I can cook ony thing."

"Very well, Anna. We will see. I have to go out this morning; and you must do the best you can. Don't fail to have dinner ready by two o'clock. Mr. Smith is a punctual man."

Anna was profuse in her promises.

"If," said I, recollecting myself, as I was about opening the street door, and returning along the passage,—"If any thing is sent home for me, be sure to take it up stairs and lay it carefully on my bed."

"Yes, mum."

"Now don't forget this, Anna."

"Och! niver fear a hate, mum," was the girl's answer. "I'll not forget a word iv y'r insthructions."

I turned away and left the house. My principal errand was a visit to the milliner's, where I wished to see a bonnet I had ordered, before it was sent home. It was this bonnet I referred to when I desired Anna to place carefully on the bed in my chamber, any thing that might come home."

On my way to the milliner's, I stopped at the grocer's where we were in the habit of dealing,

and made selections of various things that were needed.

The bonnet proved just to my taste. It was a delicate white spring bonnet, with a neat trimming, and pleased my fancy wonderfully.

"The very thing," said I, the moment my eyes rested upon it.

"Do you want a box?" asked the milliner, after I had decided to take the bonnet.

"I have one," was my answer.

"O, very well. I will send the bonnet home in a box, and you can take it out."

"That will do."

"Shall I send it home this morning?"

"If you please."

"Very well. I'll see that it is done."

After this I made a number of calls, which occupied me until after one o'clock, when I turned my face homeward. On arriving, I was admitted by my new girl, and, as the thought of my beautiful bonnet now returned to my mind, my first words were:

"Has any thing been sent home for me, Anna?"

"Och! yis indade, mum," was her answer,—"lots o' things."

"Lots of things!" said I, with manifest surprise; for I only remembered at the moment my direction to the milliner to send home my bonnet.

"Yis, indade!" responded the girl. "Lots. And the mon brought 'em on the funniest whale barry ye iver seed."

"On a wheel barrow!"

"Yis. And such a whale barry! It had a whale on each side, as I'm a livin' sinner, mum; and a cunnin' little whale in front, cocked 'way up intil the air, thot didn't touch nothin' at all—at all! There's no sich whale barrys as thot same in Ireland, me leddy!"

"And what did you do with the lots of things brought on this wheel barrow?" said I, now beginning to comprehend the girl.

"Put them on y'r bed, sure."

"On my bed!" I exclaimed, in consternation.

"Sure, and didn't I remember the last words ye spake till me? 'Anna,' says ye,—'Anna, if ony thing is sent home for me, be sure till take it carefully up stairs and lay it on me bed.' And I did thot same. Sure, I couldn't have found a nicer place, if I gone the house over."

Turning from the girl, I hurried up stairs.

It was as I had too good reason to fear. Such a sight as met my eyes! In the centre of my bed, with its snowy-white Marseilles covering, were piled "lots of things," and no mistake. Sugar, tea, cheese, coffee, soap, and various other articles, not excepting a bottle of olive oil, from the started cork of which was gently oozing a slender stream, lay in a jumbled heap; while, on a satin damask-covered chair, reposed a greasy ham.

For a moment I stood confounded. Then, giving the bell a violent jerk, I awaited, in angry impatience, the appearance of Anna, who, in due time, after going to the street door, found her way to my chamber.

"Anna!" I exclaimed, "what, in the name of goodness, possessed you to do this?"

And I pointed to the bed.

"Sure, and ye towld me till put them on ye's bed."

"I told you no such thing, you stupid creature! I said if a bonnet came, to put it on the bed."

"Och! sorry a word did ye iver say about a bonnet, mum. It's the first time I iver heard ony thing about a bonnet from yer blessed lips. And thot's thrue."

"Where is my bonnet, then? Did one come home?"

"Plase, mum, and there did. And a purty one it is, too, as iver my two eyes looked upon."

"What did you do with it?" I enquired, with a good deal of concern.

"It's safe in thot great mahogany closet, mum," she replied, pointing to my wardrobe.

I stepped quickly to the "mahogany closet," and threw open the door. Alas! for my poor bonnet! It was crushed in between two of Mr. Smith's coats, and tied to a peg, by the strings, which were, of course, crumpled to a degree that made them useless.

"Too bad! Too bad!" I murmured, as I disengaged the bonnet from its unhappy companionship with broadcloth. As it came to the light, my eyes fell upon two dark spots on the front, the unmistakable prints of Anna's greasy fingers. This was too much! I tossed it, in a moment of passion, upon the bed, where, in contact with the "lots of things," it received its final touch of ruin from a portion of the oozing contents of the sweet oil bottle.

Of the scene that followed, and of the late,

badly-cooked dinner to which my husband was introduced an hour afterwards, I will not trust myself to write. I was not, of course, in a very agreeable humor; and the record of what I said and did, and of how I looked, would be in no way flattering to my own good opinion of myself, nor prove particularly edifying to the reader.

I shall never forget Anna's new variety of "whale-barry," nor the "lots o' things" she deposited on my bed. She lived with me just seven days, and then made way for another a little more tolerable than herself.

CHAPTER XX.

A CURE FOR LOW SPIRITS.

From some cause, real or imaginary, I felt low spirited. There was a cloud upon my feelings, and I could not smile as usual, nor speak in a tone of cheerfulness. As a natural result, the light of my countenance being gone, all things around me were in a shadow. My husband was sober, and had but little to say; the children would look strangely at me when I answered their questions or spoke to them for any purpose, and the domestics moved about in a quiet manner, and when they addressed me, did so in a tone more subdued than usual.

This reaction upon my state, only made darker the clouds that veiled my spirits. I was conscious of this, and was conscious that the original cause of depression was entirely inadequate, in itself, to produce the result which had followed. Under this feeling, I made an effort to rally myself, but in vain—and sank lower from the struggle to rise above the gloom that overshadowed me.

When my husband came home at dinner time, I tried to meet him with a smile; but I felt that the light upon my countenance was feeble, and of brief duration. He looked at me earnestly, and in his kind and gentle way, enquired if I

felt no better, affecting to believe that my ailment was one of the body instead of the mind. But I scarcely answered him, and I could see that he felt hurt. How much more wretched did I become at this? Could I have then retired to my chamber, and alone given my heart full vent in a passion of tears, I might have obtained relief to my feelings. But I could not do this.

While I sat at the table forcing a little food into my mouth for appearance sake, my husband said:

"You remember the fine lad who has been with me for some time?"

I nodded my head, but the question did not awaken in my mind the least interest.

"He has not made his appearance for several days; and I learned this morning, on sending to the house of his mother, that he is very ill."

"Ah!" was my indifferent response. Had I spoken what was in my mind, I would have said, "I'm sorry, but I can't help it." I did not at the moment feel the smallest interest in the lad.

"Yes," added my husband, "and the person who called to let me know about it, expressed his fears that Edward would not get up again."

"What ails him?" I enquired.

"I did not clearly understand. But he has a fever of some kind. You remember his mother very well?"

"Oh, yes. You know she worked for me. Edward is her only child, I believe."

"Yes; and his loss to her will be almost everything."

"Is he dangerous?" I enquired, a feeling of interest beginning to stir in my heart.

"He is not expected to live."

"Poor woman! How distressed she must be! I wonder what her circumstances are just at this time. She seemed very poor when she worked for me."

"And she is very poor still, I doubt not. She has herself been sick, and during the time it is more than probable that Edward's wages were all her income. I am afraid she has not now the means of procuring for her sick boy things necessary for his comfort. Could you not go around there this afternoon, and see how they are?"

I shook my head instantly at this proposition, for sympathy for others was not strong enough to expel my selfish despondency of mind.

"Then I must step around," replied my husband, "before I go back to business, although I have a great deal to do to-day. It would not be right to neglect this lad and his mother under present circumstances."

I felt rebuked at these words, and, with an effort, said:

"I will go."

"It will be much better for you to see them than for me," returned my husband, "for you can understand their wants better, and minister to them more effectually. If they need any comforts, I would like to have you see them supplied."

It still cost me an effort to get ready, but as I had promised to do as my husband wished, the

effort had to be made. By the time I was prepared to go out, I felt something better. The exertion I was required to make, tended to disperse, slightly, the clouds that hung over me, and as they began gradually to remove, my thoughts turned, with an awakened interest, towards the object of my husband's solicitude.

All was silent within the humble abode to which my errand led me. I knocked lightly, and in a few moments the mother of Edward opened the door. She looked pale and anxious.

"How is your son, Mrs. Ellis?" I enquired, as I stepped in.

"He is very low, ma'am," she replied.

"Not dangerous, I hope?"

"The fever has left him, but he is as weak as an infant. All his strength is gone."

"But proper nourishment will restore him, now that the disease is broken."

"So the doctor says. But I'm afraid it's too late. He seems to be sinking every hour. Will you walk up and see him?"

I followed Mrs. Ellis up stairs, and into a chamber, where the sick boy lay. I was not surprised at the fear she expressed, when I saw Edward's pale, sunken face, and hollow, almost expressionless eyes. He scarcely noticed my entrance.

"Poor boy!" sighed his mother. "He has had a very sick spell."

My liveliest interest was at once awakened.

"He has been sick, indeed!" I replied, as I laid my hand upon his white forehead.

I found his skin cold and damp. The fever

had nearly burned out the vital energy of his system.

"Do you give him much nourishment?"

"He takes a little barley-water."

"Has not the doctor ordered wine?"

"Yes, ma'am," replied Mrs. Ellis, but she spoke with an air of hesitation. "He says a spoonful of good wine, three or four times a day, would be very good for him."

"And you have not given him any?"

"No, ma'am."

"We have some very pure wine, that we always keep for sickness. If you will step over to our house, and tell Alice to give you a bottle of it, I will stay with Edward until you return."

How brightly glowed that poor woman's face as my words fell upon her ears!

"O, ma'am, you are very kind!" said she. "But it will be asking too much of you to stay here!"

"You didn't ask it, Mrs. Ellis," I simply replied. "I have offered to stay; so do you go for the wine as quickly as you can, for Edward needs it very much."

I was not required to say more. In a few minutes I was alone with the sick boy, who lay almost as still as if death were resting upon his half-closed eye-lids. To some extent during the half hour I remained thus in that hushed chamber, did I realize the condition and feelings of the poor mother, whose only son lay gasping at the very door of death, and all my sympathies were, in consequence, awakened.

"As soon as Mrs. Ellis returned with the wine, about a teaspoonful was diluted, and the glass containing it placed to the sick lad's lips. The moment its flavor touched his palate, a thrill seemed to pass through his frame, and he swallowed eagerly.

"It does him good!" said I, speaking warmly, and from an impulse that made my heart glow.

We sat and looked with silent interest upon the boy's face, and we did not look in vain, for something like warmth came upon his wan cheeks, and when I placed my hand upon his forehead, the coldness and dampness were gone. The wine had quickened his languid pulse. I stayed an hour longer, and then another spoonful of the generous wine was given. Its effect was as marked as the first. I then withdrew from the humble home of the widow and her only child, promising to see them again in the morning.

When I regained the street, and my thoughts for a moment reverted to myself, how did I find all changed? The clouds had been dispersed—the heavy load had been raised from my bosom. I walked with a free step.

Sympathy for others, and active efforts to do others good, had expelled the evil spirit from my heart; and now serene peace had there again her quiet habitation. There was light in every part of my dwelling when I re-entered it, and I sung cheerfully, as I prepared with my own hands, a basket of provisions for the poor widow.

When my husband returned again in the eve-

ning, he found me at work, cheerfully, in my family, and all bright and smiling again. The efforts to do good to others had driven away the darkness from my spirit, and the sunshine was again on my countenance, and reflected from every member of my household.

MOTHS IN MY AUCTION SOFA. (178)

CHAPTER XXI.

A BARGAIN.

I AM not much of a bargain-buyer, having had, like most housekeepers, sufficient experience on that subject to effect a pretty thorough cure of the disease, mild as it was in the beginning. As all diseases, whether bodily or mental, leave behind them a predisposition to return, I have, from time to time, been subjected to slight paroxisms of the old complaint. From the effects of my last rather mild attack, I am now recovering.

I was passing along Walnut street, on my way to drop a letter in the Post Office, one morning, about ten o'clock, when the ringing of an auctioneer's bell came suddenly on my ears. Lifting my eyes, I saw the flag of Thomas & Son displayed before me, and read the words, "Auction this morning."

Here was an "exciting cause," as the doctors say, and, instantly I felt a movement of the old affection. Two or three ladies happened to be entering the store at the time, and the sudden inclination to follow them was so strong that I did not attempt its resistance. It was not my intention to buy any thing, of course; for I was conscious of no particular want. I only just wished,

if any wish were really full formed, to see what was to be sold.

Scarcely had I entered the door, when a sofa, so nearly new that it hardly bore a mark of having been used, presented itself, and captivated my fancy. The one that graced our parlor had grown somewhat out of fashion. It was in good keeping, but rather plain in style: and, as we had recently treated ourselves to handsome new carpets, did not appear to quite so good advantage as before. This one, to be sold at auction, was made after a newer pattern, and, as my eyes continued to rest upon it, the desires to have it in my parlor was fully formed.

I have said, that on entering the auction store, I was unconscious of any particular want. This was true, notwithstanding Mr. Smith and I had, a few days before, called at a cabinet maker's wareroom, to look at a sofa. In consequence of former experience in cheap furniture, we had no thought of getting a low-priced article from a second or third rate establishment; but designed, when we did purchase, to act wisely and get the best. We had been looking at a sofa for which sixty-five dollars was asked; and were hesitating between that and another upon which fifty dollars was set as the price.

It was but natural, under these circumstances, that I should look upon this sofa with more than ordinary interest. A glance told me that it was an article of superior make, and a close examination fully confirmed this impression.

A few minutes after my entrance, the sale be-

gun, and it so happened that the sofa came first on the list.

"We shall begin this morning," said the auctioneer, with a superior, fashionable sofa, made by ——. It has only been in use a short time, and is, in every respect, equal to new."

All my predilections in favor of the sofa were confirmed the moment the manufacturer's name was announced. Of course, it was of the best material and workmanship.

"What is bid for this superior sofa, made by ——," went on the salesman,—"Seventy dollars —sixty-five—sixty—fifty-five—fifty—forty-five —forty—thirty-five—thirty."

"Twenty-five dollars," said a timid voice.

"Twenty-five! Twenty-five!" cried the auctioneer.

"Twenty-six," said I.

The first bidder advanced a dollar on this; then I bid twenty-eight; he went up to twenty-nine, and I made it thirty, at which offer the sofa was knocked down to me.

"That's a bargain, and no mistake," said the salesman. "It is worth fifty dollars, if it's worth a cent."

"I'll give you five dollars advance," proposed a lady by my side, who had desired to bid, but could not bring up her courage to the point.

"No, thank you," was my prompt answer. I was too well pleased with my bargain.

When Mr. Smith came home to dinner on that day, I met him in the parlor.

"What do you think of this?" said I, pointing to the new sofa. I spoke in an exultant voice.

"Where in the world did it come from?" enquired Mr. Smith, evincing a natural surprise.

"I bought it," was my reply.

"When? where?"

"This morning, at auction."

"At auction!"

"Yes; and it's a bargain. Now guess what I gave for it?"

"Ten dollars?"

"Now Mr. Smith! But come; be serious. Isn't it cheap at forty dollars?"

Mr. Smith examined the sofa with care, and then gave it as his opinion that it wasn't dear at forty dollars.

"I got it for thirty," said I.

"Indeed! I should really call that a bargain, —provided you don't discover in it, after a while, some defect."

"I've looked at every part, over and over again," was my response to this, "and can find a defect nowhere. None exists, I am satisfied."

"Time will show," remarked Mr. Smith. There was the smallest perceptible doubt in his tone.

Next morning, on going into my parlors, I was a little worried to see two or three moths flying about the room. They were despatched with commendable quickness. On the morning that followed, the same thing occurred again; and this was repeated, morning after morning. Moreover, in a few days, these insects, so dreaded by housekeepers, showed themselves in the chambers above. Up to this time, I had neglected to put away my furs, a new set of which had been

purchased during the previous winter. I delayed this no longer.

House-cleaning time had now arrived. My new carpets were taken up and packed away, to give place to the cooler matting. Our winter clothing also received attention, and was deposited in chests and closets for the summer, duly provided with all needful protection from moths. After this came the calm of rest and self-satisfaction.

One day, about the middle of July, a lady friend called in to see me.

"That's a neat sofa, Mrs. Smith," said she, in the pause of a conversation.

"I think it very neat," was my answer.

"It's made from the same pattern with one that I had. One that I always liked, and from which I was sorry to part."

"You sold it?" said I.

"Yes. I sent it to auction."

"Ah! Why so?"

"I discovered, this spring, that the moth had got into it."

"Indeed!"

"Yes. They showed themselves, every day, in such numbers, in my parlors, that I became alarmed for my carpets. I soon traced their origin to the sofa, which was immediately packed off to auction. I was sorry to part with it; but, there was no other effective remedy."

"You lost on the sale, I presume," I ventured to remark.

"Yes; that was to be expected. It cost sixty dollars, and brought only thirty. But this loss

was to be preferred to the destruction such an army of moth as it was sending forth, would have occasioned."

I changed the subject, dexterously, having heard quite enough about the sofa to satisfy me that my bargain was likely to prove a bad one.

All the summer, I was troubled with visions of moth-eaten carpets, furs, shawls, and overcoats; and they proved to be only the foreshadowing of real things to come, for, when, in the fall, the contents of old chests, boxes, drawers, and dark closets were brought forth to the light, a state of affairs truly frightful to a housekeeper, was presented. One of the breadths of my handsome carpet had the pile so eaten off in conspicuous places, that no remedy was left but the purchase and substitution of a new one, at a cost of nearly ten dollars. In dozens of places the texture of the carpet was eaten entirely through. I was, as my lady readers may naturally suppose, very unhappy at this. But, the evil by no means found a limit here. On opening my fur boxes, I found that the work of destruction had been going on there also. A single shake of the muff, threw little fibres and flakes of fur in no stinted measure upon the air; and, on dashing my hand hard against it, a larger mass was detached, showing the skin bare and white beneath. My furs were ruined. They had cost seventy dollars, and were not worth ten!

A still further examination into our stock of winter clothing, showed that the work of destruction had extended to almost every article. Scarcely any thing had escaped.

Troubled, worried, and unhappy as I was, I yet concealed from Mr. Smith the origin of all this ruin. He never suspected our cheap sofa for a moment. After I had, by slow degrees, recovered from my chagrin and disappointment, my thoughts turned, naturally, upon a disposition of the sofa. What was to be done with it? As to keeping it over another season, that was not to be thought of for a moment. But, would it be right, I asked myself, to send it back to auction, and let it thus go into the possession of some housekeeper, as ignorant of its real character as I had been? I found it very hard to reconcile my conscience to such a disposition of the sofa. And there was still another difficulty in the way. What excuse for parting with it could I make to Mr. Smith? He had never suspected that article to be the origination of all the mischief and loss we had sustained.

Winter began drawing to a close, and still the sofa remained in its place, and still was I in perplexity as to what should be done with it.

"Business requires me to go to Charleston," said Mr. Smith, one day late in February.

"How long will you be away?" was my natural enquiry.

"From ten days to two weeks," replied Mr. Smith.

"So long as that?"

"It will hardly be possible to get home earlier than the time I have mentioned."

"You go in the Osprey?"

"Yes. She sails day after to-morrow. So you will have all ready for me, if you please."

Never before had the announcement of my husband that he had to go away on business given me pleasure. The moment he said that he would be absent, the remedy for my difficulty suggested itself.

The very day Mr. Smith sailed in the steamer for Charleston, I sent for an upholsterer, and after explaining to him the defect connected with my sofa, directed him to have the seating all removed, and then replaced by new materials, taking particular care to thoroughly cleanse the inside of the wood work, lest the vestige of a moth should be left remaining.

All this was done, at a cost of twenty dollars. When Mr. Smith returned, the sofa was back in its place, and he was none the wiser for the change, until some months afterwards, when, unable to keep the secret any longer, I told him the whole story.

I am pretty well cured, I think now, of bargain-buying.

CHAPTER XXII.

A PEEVISH DAY AND ITS CONSEQUENCES.

THERE are few housekeepers who have not had their sick and peevish days. I have had mine, as the reader will see by the following story, which I some time since ventured to relate, in the third person, and which I now take the liberty of introducing into these confessions.

"It is too bad, Rachel, to put me to all this trouble; and you know I can hardly hold up my head."

Thus spoke Mrs. Smith, in a peevish voice, to a quiet looking domestic, who had been called up from the kitchen to supply some unimportant omission in the breakfast table arrangement.

Rachel looked hurt and rebuked, but made no reply.

"How could you speak in that way to Rachel?" said Mr. Smith, as soon as the domestic had withdrawn.

"If you felt just as I do, Mr. Smith, you would speak cross, too!" Mrs. Smith replied a little warmly—"I feel just like a rag; and my head aches as if it would burst."

"I know you feel badly, and I am very sorry for you. But still, I suppose it is as easy to speak

kindly as harshly. Rachel is very obliging and attentive, and should be borne with in occasional omissions, which you of course know are not wilful."

"It is easy enough to preach," retorted Mrs. Smith, whose temper, from bodily lassitude and pain, was in quite an irritable state. The reader will understand at least one of the reasons of this, when he is told that the scene here presented occurred during the last oppressive week in August

Mr. Smith said no more. He saw that to do so would only be to provoke instead of quieting his wife's ill humor. The morning meal went by in silence, but little food passing the lips of either. How could it, when the thermometer was ninety-four at eight o'clock in the morning, and the leaves upon the trees were as motionless as if suspended in a vacuum. Bodies and minds were relaxed—and the one turned from food, as the other did from thought, with an instinctive aversion.

After Mr. Smith had left his home for his place of business, Mrs. Smith went up into her chamber, and threw herself upon the bed, her head still continuing to ache with great violence. It so happened that a week before, the chamber-maid had gone away, sick, and all the duties of the household had in consequence devolved upon Rachel, herself not very well. Cheerfully, however, had she endeavored to discharge these accumulated duties, and but for the unhappy, peevish state of mind in which Mrs. Smith indulged, would have discharged them without a

murmuring thought. But, as she was a faithful, conscientious woman, and, withal, sensitive in her feelings, to be found fault with, worried her exceedingly. Of this Mrs. Smith was well aware, and had, until the latter part of the trying month of August, acted towards Rachel with consideration and forbearance. But the last week of August was too much for her. The sickness of the chamber maid threw such heavy duties upon Rachel, whose daily headaches and nervous relaxation of body were borne without a complaint, that their perfect performance was almost impossible. Slight omissions, which were next to unavoidable, under the circumstances, became so annoying to Mrs. Smith, herself, as it has been seen, laboring under great bodily and mental prostration, that she could not bear them.

"She knows better, and she could do better, if she chose," was her rather uncharitable comment, often inwardly made on the occurrence of some new trouble.

After Mr. Smith had taken his departure on the morning just referred to, Mrs. Smith went up into her chamber, as has been seen, and threw herself languidly upon a bed, pressing her hands to her throbbing temples, as she did so, and murmuring:

"I can't live at this rate!"

At the same time, Rachel sat down in the kitchen the large waiter upon which she had arranged the dishes from the breakfast table, and then sinking into a chair, pressed one hand upon her forehead, and sat for more than a minute in

troubled silence. It had been three days since she had received from Mrs. Smith a pleasant word, and the last remark, made to her a short time before, had been the unkindest of all. At another time, even all this would not have moved her—she could have perceived that Mrs. Smith was not in a right state—that lassitude of body had produced a temporary infirmity of mind. But, being herself affected by the oppressive season almost as much as her mistress, she could not make these allowances. While still seated, the chamber bell was rung with a quick, startling jerk.

"What next?" peevishly ejaculated Rachel, and then slowly proceeded to obey the summons.

"How could you leave my chamber in such a condition as this?" was the salutation that met her ear, as she entered the presence of Mrs. Smith, who, half raised upon the bed, and leaning upon her hand, looked the very personification of languor, peevishness, and ill-humor. "You had plenty of time while we were eating breakfast to have put things a little to rights!"

To this Rachel made no reply, but turned away and went back into the kitchen. She had scarcely reached that spot, before the bell rang again, louder and quicker than before; but she did not answer it. In about three minutes it was jerked with an energy that snapped the wire, but Rachel was immovable. Five minutes elapsed, and then Mrs. Smith, fully aroused from the lethargy that had stolen over her, came down with a quick, firm step.

"What's the reason you didn't answer my bell? say?" she asked, in an excited voice.

Rachel did not reply.

"Do you hear me?"

Rachel had never been so treated before; she had lived with Mrs. Smith for three years, and had rarely been found fault with. She had been too strict in regard to the performance of her duty to leave much room for even a more exacting mistress to find fault; but now, to be overtasked and sick, and to be chidden, rebuked, and even angrily assailed, was more than she could well bear. She did not suffer herself to speak for some moments, and then her voice trembled, and the tears came out upon her cheeks.

"I wish you to get another in my place. I find I don't suit you. My time will be up day after to-morrow."

"Very well," was Mrs. Smith's firm reply, as she turned away, and left the kitchen.

Here was trouble in good earnest. Often and often had Mrs. Smith said, during the past two or three years—"What should I do without Rachel?" And now she had given notice that she was going to leave her, and under circumstances which made pride forbid a request to stay. Determined to act out her part of the business with firmness and decision, she dressed herself and went out, hot and oppressive as it was, and took her way to an intelligence office, where she paid the required fee, and directed a cook and chamber maid to be sent to her. On the next morning, about ten o'clock, an Irish girl came and offered herself as a cook, and was,

after sundry questions and answers, engaged. So soon as this negotiation was settled, Rachel retired from the kitchen, leaving the new-comer in full possession. In half an hour after she received her wages, and left, in no very happy frame of mind, a home that had been for three years, until within a few days, a pleasant one. As for Mrs. Smith, she was ready to go to bed sick; but this was impracticable. Nancy, the new cook, had expressly stipulated that she was to have no duties unconnected with the kitchen. The consequence was, that, notwithstanding the thermometer ranged above ninety, and the atmosphere remained as sultry as air from a heated oven, Mrs. Smith was compelled to arrange her chamber and parlors. By the time this was done, she was in a condition to go to bed, and lie until dinner time. The arrival of this important period brought new troubles and vexations. Dinner was late by forty minutes, and then came on the table in a most abominable condition. A fine sirloin was burnt to a crisp. The tomatoes were smoked, and the potatoes watery. As if this were not enough to mar the pleasure of the dinner hour for a hungry husband, Mrs. Smith added thereto a distressed countenance and discouraging complaints. Nancy was grumbled at and scolded every time she had occasion to appear in the room, and her single attempt to excuse herself on account of not understanding the cook stove, was met by:

"Do hush, will you! I'm out of all patience!"

As to the latter part of the sentence, that

was a needless waste of words. The condition of mind she described was fully apparent.

About three o'clock in the afternoon, just as Mrs. Smith had found a temporary relief from a troubled mind and a most intolerable headache, in sleep, a tap on the chamber door awoke her, there stood Nancy, all equipped for going out.

"I find I won't suit you, ma'am," said Nancy, "and so you must look out for another girl."

Having said this, she turned away and took her departure, leaving Mrs. Smith in a state of mind, as it is said, "more easily imagined than described."

"O dear! what shall I do!" at length broke from her lips, as she burst into tears, and burying her face in the pillow, sobbed aloud. Already she had repented of her fretfulness and fault-finding temper, as displayed towards Rachel, and could she have made a truce with pride, or silenced its whispers, would have sent for her well-tried domestic, and endeavored to make all fair with her again. But, under the circumstances, this was now impossible. While yet undetermined how to act, the street bell rung, and she was compelled to attend the door, as she was now alone in the house. She found, on opening it, a rough-looking country girl, who asked if she were the lady who wanted a chamber maid. Any kind of help was better than none at all, and so Mrs. Smith asked the young woman to walk in. In treating with her in regard to her qualifications for the situation she applied for, she discovered that she knew "almost nothing at all about any thing." The

stipulation that she was to be a doer-of-all-work-in-general, until a cook could be obtained, was readily agreed to, and then she was shown to her room in the attic, where she prepared herself for entering upon her duties.

"Will you please, ma'am, show me what you want me to do?" asked the new help, presenting herself before Mrs. Smith.

"Go into the kitchen, Ellen, and see that the fire is made. I'll be down there presently."

To be compelled to see after a new and ignorant servant, and direct her in every thing, just at so trying a season of the year, and while her mind was "all out of sorts," was a severe task for poor Mrs. Smith. She found that Ellen, as she had too good reason for believing, was totally unacquainted with kitchen work. She did not even know how to kindle a coal fire; nor could she manage the stove after Mrs. Smith had made the fire for her. All this did not in any way tend to make her less unhappy or more patient than before. On retiring for the night, she had a high fever, which continued unabated until morning, when her husband found her really ill; so much so as to make the attendance of a doctor necessary.

A change in the air had taken place during the night, and the temperature had fallen many degrees. This aided the efforts of the physician, and enabled him so to adapt his remedies as to speedily break the fever. But the ignorance and awkwardness of Ellen, apparent in her attempts to arrange her bed and chamber, so worried her mind, that she was near relapsing into her for-

mer feverish and excited state. The attendance of an elder maiden sister was just in time. All care was taken from her thoughts, and she had a chance of recovering a more healthy tone of mind and body. During the next week, she knew little or nothing of how matters were progressing out of her own chamber. A new cook had been hired, of whom she was pleased to hear good accounts, although she had not seen her, and Ellen, under the mild and judicious instruction of her sister, had learned to make up a bed neatly, to sweep, and dust in true style, and to perform all the little etceteras of chamber-work greatly to her satisfaction. She was, likewise, good tempered, willing, and to all appearances strictly trust-worthy.

One morning, about a week after she had become too ill to keep up, she found herself so far recovered as to be able to go down stairs to breakfast. Every thing upon the table she found arranged in the neatest style. The food was well cooked, especially some tender rice cakes, of which she was very fond.

"Really, these are delicious!" said she, as the finely flavored cakes almost melted in her mouth. "And this coffee is just the thing! How fortunate we have been to obtain so good a cook! I was afraid we should never be able to replace Rachel. But even she is equalled, if not surpassed."

"Still she does not surpass Rachel," said Mr. Smith, a little gravely. "Rachel was a treasure."

"Indeed she was. And I have been sorry enough I ever let her go," returned Mrs. Smith

At that moment a new cook entered with a plate of warm cakes.

"Rachel!" ejaculated Mrs. Smith, letting her knife and fork fall. "How do you do? I am glad to see you! Welcome home again!"

As she spoke quickly and earnestly, she held out her hand, and grasped that of her old domestic warmly. Rachel could not speak, but as she left the room she put her apron to her eyes. Her's were not the only ones dim with rising moisture.

For at least a year to come, both Mrs. Smith and her excellent cook will have no cause to complain of each other. How they will get along during the last week of next August, we cannot say, but hope the lesson they have both received will teach them to bear and forbear.

CHAPTER XXIII.

WORDS.

"The foolish thing!" said my aunt Rachel, speaking warmly, "to get hurt at a mere word. It's a little hard that people can't open their lips but somebody is offended."

"Words are things!" said I, smiling.

"Very light things! A person must be tender, indeed, that is hurt by a word."

"The very lightest thing may hurt, if it falls on a tender place."

"I don't like people who have these tender places," said aunt Rachel. "I never get hurt at what is said to me. No—never! To be ever picking and mincing, and chopping off your words—to be afraid to say this or that—for fear somebody will be offended! I can't abide it!"

"People who have these tender places can't help it, I suppose. This being so, ought we not to regard their weakness?" said I. "Pain, either of body or mind, is hard to bear, and we should not inflict it causelessly."

"People who are so wonderfully sensitive," replied aunt Rachel, growing warmer, "ought to shut themselves up at home, and not come among sensible, good tempered persons. As far as I am concerned, I can tell them, one and all, that I am not going to pick out every hard word

from a sentence as carefully as I would seeds from a raisin. Let them crack them with their teeth, if they are afraid to swallow them whole."

Now, for all that aunt Rachel went on after this strain, she was a kind, good soul, in the main, and I could see, was sorry for having hurt the feelings of Mary Lane. But she didn't like to acknowledge that she was in the wrong; that would detract too much from the self-complacency with which she regarded herself. Knowing her character very well, I thought it best not to continue the little argument about the importance of words, and so changed the subject. But, every now and then, aunt Rachel would return to it, each time softening a little towards Mary. At last she said:

"I'm sure it was a little thing. A very little thing. She might have known that nothing unkind was intended on my part."

"There are some subjects, aunt," I replied, "to which we cannot bear the slightest allusion. And a sudden reference to them is very apt to throw us off of our guard. What you said to Mary, has, in all probability, touched some weakness of character, or probed some wound that time has not been able to heal. I have always thought her a sensible, good natured girl."

"And so have I. But I really cannot think that she has shown her good sense or good nature in the present case. It is a very bad failing this, of being over sensitive; and exceedingly annoying to one's friends."

"It is, I know; but still, all of us have a weak

point, and when that is assailed, we are very apt to betray our feelings."

"Well, I say now, as I have always said—I don't like to have any thing to do with people who have these weak points. This being hurt by a word, as if words were blows, is something that does not come within the range of my sympathies."

"And yet, aunt," said I, "all have weak points. Even you are not entirely free from them."

"Me!" aunt Rachel bridled.

"Yes; and if even as light a thing as a word were to fall upon them, you would suffer pain."

"Pray, ma'am," said aunt Rachel, with much dignity of manner; she was chafed by my words, light as they were; "inform me where these weaknesses, of which you are pleased to speak, lie?"

"Oh, no; you must excuse me. That would be very much out of place. But I only stated a general fact that appertains to all of us."

Aunt Rachel looked very grave. I had laid the weight of words upon a weakness of her character, and it had given her pain. That weakness was a peculiarly good opinion of herself. I had made no allegation against her; and there was none in my mind. My words simply expressed the general truth that we all have weaknesses, and included her in their application. But she imagined that I referred to some particular defect or fault, and mail-proof as she was against words, they had wounded her.

For a day or two, aunt Rachel remained more sober than was her wont. I knew the cause, but

did not attempt to remove from her mind any impression my words had made. One day, about a week after, I said to her:

"Aunt Rachel, I saw Mary Lane's mother this morning."

"Ah?" The old lady looked up at me enquiringly.

"I don't wonder your words hurt the poor girl," I added.

"Why? What did I say?" quickly asked aunt Rachel.

"You said that she was a jilt."

"But I was only in jest, and she knew it. I did not really mean any thing. I'm surprised that Mary should be so foolish."

"You will not be surprised when you know all," was my answer.

"All? What all? I'm sure I wasn't in earnest. I didn't mean to hurt the poor girl's feelings."

My aunt looked very much troubled.

"No one blames you, aunt Rachel," said I. "Mary knows you didn't intend wounding her."

"But why should she take a little word so much to heart? It must have had more truth in it than I supposed."

"Did you know that Mary refused an offer of marriage from Walter Green, last week?"

"Why, no! It can't be possible! Refused Walter Green?"

"Yes."

"They've been intimate for a long time."

"I know."

"She certainly encouraged him."

"I think it more than probable.

"Is it possible, then, that she did really jilt the young man?" exclaimed aunt Rachel.

"This has been said of her," I replied. "But, as far as I can learn, she was really attached to him, and suffered great pain in rejecting his offer. Wisely she regarded marriage as the most important event of her life, and refused to make so solemn a contract with one in whose principles she had not the fullest confidence."

"But she ought not to have encouraged Walter, if she did not intend marrying him," said aunt Rachel, with some warmth.

"She encouraged him so long as she thought well of him. A closer view revealed points of character hidden by distance. When she saw these, her feelings were already deeply involved. But, like a true woman, she turned from the proffered hand, even though, while in doing so, her heart palpitated with pain. There is nothing false about Mary Lane. She could no more trifle with a lover than she could commit a crime. Think, then, how almost impossible it would be for her to hear herself called, under existing circumstances, even in sport, a jilt, without being hurt. Words sometimes have power to hurt more than blows. Do you not see this now, aunt Rachel?"

"Oh, yes, yes. I see it; and I saw it before," said the old lady. "And, in future, I will be more careful of my words. It is pretty late in life to learn this lesson—but we are never too late to learn. Poor Mary! It grieves me to think that I should have hurt her so much."

Yes, words often have in them a smarting force, and we cannot be too guarded how we use them. "Think twice before you speak once," is a trite, but wise saying. We teach it to our children very carefully, but are too apt to forget that it has not lost its application to ourselves.

CHAPTER XXIV.

MAY BE SO.

"NEXT time you go out, you'll buy me a wagon, won't you, mother?" said my little boy to me, one day.

I didn't want to say "no," and destroy his happy feelings; and I was not prepared to say "yes;" and so I gave the evasive reply so often used under such circumstances, "May be so," and which was meant rather as a negative than an affirmative. The child was satisfied; for he gave my words the meaning he wished them to have. In a little while after, I had forgotten all about it. Not so my boy. To him the "May be so" was "yes," and he set his heart, confidently, on receiving the wagon the next time I should go out. This happened on the afternoon of that very day. It was towards evening when I returned. The moment I rung the bell at my own door, I heard his pattering feet and gleeful voice in the entry.

"Where's my wagon?" said he, as I entered, a shade of disappointment falling suddenly upon his excited, happy face.

"What wagon, dear?" I asked.

"My wagon. The wagon you promised to buy me."

"I didn't promise to buy a wagon, my son."

"Oh, yes you did, mother! You promised me this morning."

Tears were already in his eye, and his face wore a look of distressing disappointment.

"I promised to buy you a wagon? I am sure I remember nothing about it," I replied confidently. What in the world put that into your head?"

"Didn't I ask you?" said the child, the tears now overflowing his cheeks.

"Yes, I believe you did ask me something about a wagon; but I didn't promise to buy you one."

"Oh, yes you did, mother. You said may be so."

"But 'may be so' doesn't mean yes."

At this the little fellow uttered a distressing cry. His heart was almost broken by disappointment. He had interpreted my words according to his own wishes, and not according to their real meaning.

Unprepared for an occurrence of this kind, I was not in the mood to sympathise with my child fully. To be met thus, at the moment of my return home, disturbed me.

"I didn't promise to buy you a wagon; and you must stop crying about it," said I, seeing that he had given way to his feelings, and was crying in a loud voice.

But he cried on. I went up stairs to lay off my things, and he followed, still crying.

"You must hush, now," said I, more positively. "I cannot permit this. I never promised to buy you a wagon."

"You said may be so," sobbed the child.

"May be so, and yes, are two different things. If I had said that I would buy you a wagon, then there would have been some reason in your disappointment; but I said no such thing."

He had paused to listen; but, as I ceased speaking, his crying was renewed.

"You must stop this now. There is no use in it, and I will not have it," said I, resolutely.

My boy choked down for a few moments at this, and half stifled his grief; but o'ermastering him, it flowed on again as wildly as ever. I felt impatient.

"Stop this moment, I say!" And I took hold of his arm firmly. My will is strong, and when a little excited, it often leads me beyond where I would go in moments of reflection. My boy knew this by experience. By my manner of speaking he saw that I was in earnest, and that, if he did not obey me, punishment would follow. So, with what must have been a powerful effort for one so young, he stifled the utterance of his grief. But, the storm within raged none the less violently, and I could see his little frame quiver as he strove to repress the rising sobs.

Turning away from me, he went and sat down on a low seat in a corner of the room. I saw his form in the glass as I stood before it to arrange my hair, after laying aside my bonnet; and for the first time my feelings were touched. There was an abandonment in his whole attitude; an air of grief about him that affected me with pity and tenderness.

"Poor child!" I sighed. "His heart is almost

broken. I ought to have said yes or no; and then all would have been settled."

"Come," said I, after a few moments, reaching my hand towards the child—"let us go down and look out for father. He will be home soon."

I spoke kindly and cheerfully. But he neither moved, looked up, nor gave the smallest sign that he heard me.

"Oh, well," said I, with some impatience in my voice—"it doesn't matter at all. If you'd rather sit there than come down into the parlor and look out for dear father, you can please yourself."

And turning away as I spoke, I left the chamber, and went down stairs. Seating myself at a window, I looked forth and endeavored to feel unconcerned and cheerful. But, this was beyond my power. I saw nothing but the form of my grieving child, and could think of nothing but his sorrow and disappointment.

"Nancy," said I to one of my domestics, who happened to come into the parlor to ask me some question, "I wish you would run down to the toy store in the next block, and buy Neddy a wagon. His heart is almost broken about one."

The girl, always willing, when kindly spoken to, ran off to obey my wishes, and in a little while came back with the article wanted.

"Now," said I, "go up into my room and tell Neddy that I've got something for him. Don't mention the wagon; I want to take him by surprise."

Nancy went bounding up the stairs, and I placed the wagon in the centre of the room,

where it would meet the child's eyes on the moment of his entrance, and then sat down to await his coming, and enjoy his surprise and delight.

After the lapse of about a minute, I heard Nancy coming down slowly.

"Neddy's asleep," said she, looking in at the door.

"Asleep!" I felt greatly disappointed.

"Yes, ma'am. He was on the floor asleep. I took him up, and laid him in your bed."

"Then he's over his troubles," said I, attempting to find a relief for my feelings in this utterance. But no such relief came.

Taking the wagon in my hand, I went up to the chamber where he lay, and bent over him. The signs of grief were still upon his innocent face, and every now and then a faint sigh or sob gave evidence that even sleep had not yet hushed, entirely, the storm which had swept over him.

"Neddy!" I spoke to him in a voice of tenderness, hoping that my words might reach his ear. "Neddy, dear, I've bought you a wagon."

But his senses were locked. Taking him up, I undressed him, and then, after kissing his lips, brow, and cheeks, laid him in his little bed, and placed the wagon on the pillow beside him.

Even until the late hour at which I retired on that evening, were my feelings oppressed by the incident I have described. My "May be so," uttered in order to avoid giving the direct answer my child wanted, had occasioned him far more pain than a positive refusal of his request could have done.

"I will be more careful in future," said I, as I

lay thinking about the occurrence, "how I create false hopes. My yea shall be yea, and my nay nay. Of these cometh not evil."

In the morning when I awoke, I found Neddy in possession of his wagon. He was running with it around the room, as happy as if a tear had never been upon his cheek. I looked at him for many minutes without speaking. At last, seeing that I was awake, he bounded up to the bedside, and, kissing me, said:

"Thank you, dear mother, for buying me this wagon! You are a good mother!"

I must own to having felt some doubts on the subject of Neddy's compliment at the time. Since this little experience, I have been more careful how I answer the petitions of my children; and avoid the "May be so," "I'll see about it," and other such evasive answers that come so readily to the lips. The good result I have experienced in many instances.

CHAPTER XXV.

"THE POOR CHILD DIED."

My baby, nine months old, had some fever, and seemed very unwell. One neighbor said:

"You'd better send for the doctor."

"Another suggested that it had, no doubt, eaten something that disagreed with it, and that a little antimonial wine would enable it to throw it off; another advised a few grains of calomel, and another a dose of rheubarb. But I said:

"No. I'll wait a little while, and see if it won't get better."

"You should give him medicine in time. Many a person dies from not taking medicine in time;" said a lady who expressed more than usual concern for the well-being of my baby. She had a very sick child herself.

"Many more die," I replied, "from taking medicine too soon. I believe that one half of the diseases in the world are produced by medicines, and that the other half are often made worse by their injudicious administration."

"You'd better send for the doctor," urged the lady.

"No. I'll wait until the morning, and then, if he's no better, or should be worse, I'll call in our physician. Children often appear very sick

one hour, and are comparatively well again in the next."

"It's a great risk," said the lady, gravely. "A very great risk. I called in the doctor the moment my dear little Eddy began to droop about. And it's well I did. He's near death's door as it is; and without medical aid I would certainly have lost him before this. He's only been sick a week, and you know yourself how low he is reduced. Where do you think he would have been without medicine? The disease has taken a terrible hold of him. Why, the doctor has bled him twice; and his little chest is raw all over from a blister. He has been cupped and leeched. We have had mustard plasters upon his arms and the calves of his legs. I don't know how many grains of calomel he has taken; and it has salivated him dreadfully. Oh! such a sore mouth! Poor child! He suffers dreadfully. Besides, he has taken some kind of powder almost every hour. They are dreadfully nauseous; and we have to hold him, every time, and pour them down his throat. Oh, dear! It makes my heart sick. Now, with all this, the disease hangs on almost as bad as ever. Suppose we hadn't sent for the doctor at first? Can't you see what would have been the consequence? It is very wrong to put off calling in a physician upon the first symptoms of a disease."

"Pardon me, Mrs. Lee, for saying so," was my reply, but I cannot help thinking that, if you had not called the doctor, your child would have been quite well to-day."

Mrs. Lee—that was the lady's name—uttered

an exclamation of surprise and disapproval of my remark.

"But, cannot you see, yourself, that it is not the disease that has reduced your child so low. The bleeding, blistering, cupping, leeching, and calomel administrations, would have done all this, had your child been perfectly well when it went into the doctor's hands."

"But the disease would have killed him inevitably. If it requires all this to break it, don't you see that it must have taken a most fatal hold on the poor child's system."

"No, Mrs. Lee, I cannot see any such thing," was my reply. "The medicine probably fixed the disease, that would, if left alone, have retired of itself. What does the doctor say ails the child?"

"He does not seem to know. There seems to be a complication of diseases."

"Produced by the treatment, no doubt. If there had been scarlet fever, or small pox, or croup, active and energetic treatment would, probably, have been required, and the doctor would have known what he was about in administering his remedies. But, in a slight indisposition, like that from which your child suffered, it is, in my opinion, always better to give no medicine for a time. Drugs thrown into the tender system of a child, will always produce disease of some kind, more or less severe; and where slight disorders already exist, they are apt to give them a dangerous hold upon the body, or, uniting with them, cause a most serious, and, at times, fatal illness."

But Mrs. Lee shook her head. She thought the doctors knew best. They had great confidence in their family physician. He had doctored them through many dangerous attacks, and had always brought them through safely. As to the new-fangled notions about giving little or no medicine, she had no confidence in them. Medicine was necessary at times, and she always gave her children medicine at least two or three times a year, whether they were sick or well. Prevention, in her eyes, was better than cure. And where there was actual sickness, she was in favor of vigorous treatment. One good dose of medicine would do more good than a hundred little ones; with much more to the same effect.

On the next morning, my dear baby, who was just as sick for a few hours as Mrs. Lee's child was at first, was as well as ever.

Not long after breakfast, I was sent for by Mrs. Lee. Her poor child was much worse. The servant said that she was sure it was dying. I changed my dress hurriedly, and went over to the house of my neighbor.

Shall I describe the painful object that met my sight? It was three days since I had seen the little sufferer; but, oh! how it had changed in that brief time. Its face was sunken, its eyes far back in their sockets, and its forehead marked with lines of suffering. The whole of its breast was raw from the blister, and its mouth, lying open, showed, with painful distinctness, the dreadful injury wrought by the mercury thrown, with such a liberal hand, into its delicate system. All the life seemed to have withdrawn

itself from the skin; for the vital forces, in the centre of its body, were acting but feebly.

The doctor came in while I was there. He said but little. It was plain that he was entirely at fault, and that he saw no hope of a favorable issue. All his "active treatment" had tended to break down the child, rather than cure the disease from which it at first suffered. There was a great deal of heat about the child's head, and he said something about having it shaved for a blister.

"Wouldn't ice do better, doctor?" I felt constrained to suggest. He turned upon me quickly, and seemed annoyed.

"No, madam!" he replied with dignity.

I said no more, for I felt how vain my words would be. The blister, however, was not ordered; but, in its stead, mustard plasters were directed to be placed over the feet and legs to the knees, and a solution of iodine, or iron, I don't now remember which, prescribed, to be given every half hour.

I went home, some time after the doctor left, feeling sick at heart. "They are murdering that child," I could not help saying to myself. My own dear babe I found full of health and life; and I hugged it to my breast with a feeling of thankfulness.

Before the day closed, Mrs. Lee's poor child died. Was it a cause of wonder?

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